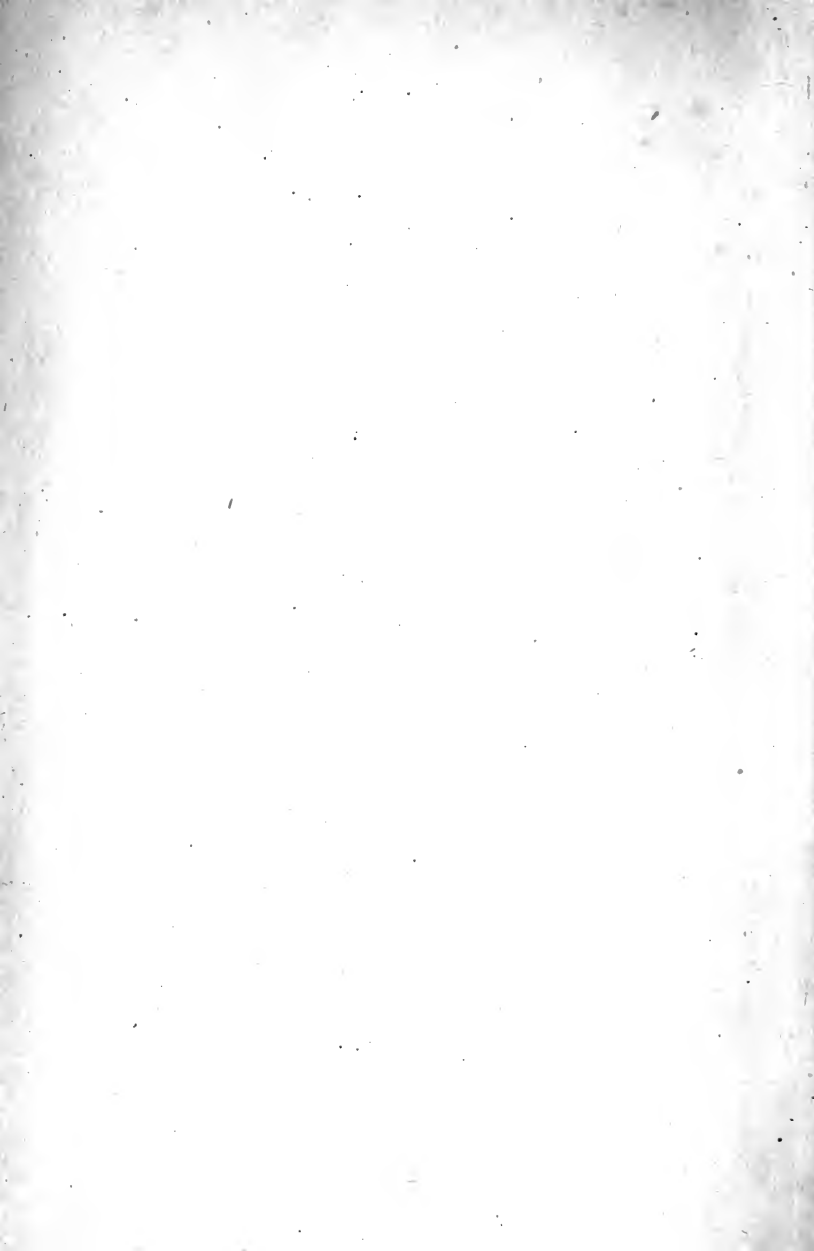




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HOPE MEREDITH.

VOL. I.



HOPE MEREDITH.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

“ST. OLAVE’S,” “JANITA’S CROSS,”

“THE BLUE RIBBON,”

&c. &c.

“A mien and face
In which full plainly I can trace
Benignity and home-bred sense,
Ripening in perfect innocence.”

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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HOPE MEREDITH.

CHAPTER I.

Gen. Rev. Ray 12.25.1 Proctoring 230.
IT stood about a mile away from the village; Nunthorpe Chase, the family seat of the Lauderdales. A quaint, picturesque old house, with the moss of well-nigh four centuries staining its red gables, and dappling with many a patch of russet, olive, and gold, its stone mullioned bays and oriels. An avenue of rook-colonised elm-trees led up to the south front, stopping short at a balustraded terrace, whereon, in summer time, a pair of peacocks were wont to take their pastime, after a somewhat noisy fashion.

Over the principal entrance was the Lauderdale crest—a lion *passant*, given to Guy, the first baronet, when he returned with his comrades from a voyage of discovery in the Spanish main. And all round and about, beyond park and pleasure, lay the woods, the beautiful Nuntorpe woods, with many a glade and dingle breaking away into great slopes of moorland, purple-blue in early autumn with heather and gentian, or brightening into a golden glory as the blossoming gorse burst out like flashes of sunshine to say that spring had come.

The house had its own traditions, as all such houses are bound to have. A lady, unnaturally tall of stature, was sometimes seen wandering up and down at untimely hours upon that balustraded terrace. Somewhere, in unexplored recesses of the northern wing, was a walled-up chamber, from which

strange noises, as of rustling garments or of clanking chains; were heard to issue. Before any untoward event was going to happen in the family, a knocking was heard at the oriel window of the portrait-gallery, followed by a whizzing sound, as of the flight of some heavy-winged bird. And in the musty, worm-eaten diary of Sir Hugh Lauderdale, member of the Privy Council of James II. was a most circumstantial account of an armed knight who had been distinctly seen, on one moonlight night, to ride slowly, mounted on a black steed, through the great entrance-hall; and then, without clatter of hoof or drawing of bolt, to disappear through the iron-studded door.

But, spite of all these stories, carefully treasured up and handed down from one to another of the successive butlers or house-keepers of the place, Nunthorpe was a right pleasant old mansion. Bright enough

was the flashing firelight which in winter nights poured forth beneath the large mantelpiece of the oak dining-room, making flickering shadows on the portraits of the Lauderdale people, knights and ladies brave, who had done their work, and suffered their pains, and played out their lives in that venerable homestead. Warm was the smile of the summer sunshine glancing through the stained windows of the picture-gallery upon suits of armour, and Indian cabinets, and Eastern curiosities, which Lauderdale warriors had from time to time treasured there. There was a feeling as of some living yet unseen human presence brooding everywhere. The life of the old generations, their loves, their hates, their joys, their sorrows, throbbed and stirred in every chamber. The place was full of memories.

Perhaps more full of memory now than

hope. Onemight have looked for brighter faces at Nunthorpe Chase than those of Sir David Lauderdale and Madolin, his daughter, who were now sole occupiers of the place. There should have been children's voices, merry, laughing voices, echoing under those boars' tusks and deers' antlers in the big silent entrance-hall, and children's footsteps, many and musical, pattering up and down the long panelled corridors; but no children ever came to Nunthorpe Chase—Miss Lauderdale did not care for them.

There should have been guests, brave and beautiful, to catch upon their satins and jewels the flash of that blazing firelight, or to make holiday in the pleasant garden, with its shady alleys so meet for lovers' talk, its sunny lawns and terraces so fitting for jest and game and gathering; but few guests ever came to Nunthorpe Chase. Miss Lauderdale did not care for company.

There should have been many a banquet in that grand old dining-room, whose very walls seemed steeped with fragrance of wine and spices, or seasoned with after-dinner joke and repartee of the olden time; but company was rarely invited to Nunthorpe Chase. Only now and then, when Sir David's sole surviving sister, majestic Miss Griselda, was down from London, the solemn pageant of a dinner-party, with much glitter of plate and silent stepping to and fro of powdered footmen, was gone through, followed at a due interval by the inevitable calls of ceremony. Miss Lauderdale did not care to "entertain."

What, then, might Miss Lauderdale be pleased to care for? Apparently nothing but to idle away her time in the woods, crushing down the blue-bells and wind-flowers with those dainty feet of hers. Or to sit with her hands clasped behind her head,

whilst the winter twilight crept up and about in the silken-curtained drawing-room, and Sir David breathed heavily in his cushioned chair. Or to write verses in old English text, and illuminate them with queer, grotesque, or fanciful devices, copied from missals in the library. And the poem she had written out most frequently, and illustrated with the choicest wealth of leaf and bud and flower, was that one of Mariana in the moated grange, which has for its burden :

“ I am aweary, aweary ;
I would that I were dead.”

People who had nothing else to do, wondered that Miss Lauderdale did not marry. True, the broad acres of Nunthorpe Chase would only descend in the male line ; but still there was money enough in the Lauderdale coffers, and patronage enough in the Lauderdale family, to make Sir David's only

child an eligible match for the best of the county aristocracy. And Madolin was beautiful too, tall of stature and fair of face as any of the ladies who, in ruffs and farthingales, or with loose tresses and half-covered bosoms, looked down from their gilded frames in the portrait-gallery.

But Miss Lauderdale did not care for that either. It was not her will to marry. So Princess Madolin said with royal calmness, as time after time she was summoned to the library, to receive, through her stately old father, the offer of some fresh suitor's heart. And she would listen patiently, but with coldly folded hands and no light of woman's love or longing in her great shadowy eyes, whilst Sir David, who would fain have seen his only child a happy wife before going to his own place under the carven canopies of the dead Lauderdale people in Nunthorpe church, set

before her the advantages of such and such an alliance which had been proposed to him. This would give social status ; that, patronage in Church or State ; another, wealth ; another, the prestige of intellectual influence. He told her, if no husband were accepted, with due shelter of home and name, the days would surely come when a new master must take possession of Nunthorpe Chase, and she, no longer its lady and mistress, must drift into the obscurity of old maidenhood. Old maidenhood, too, without the importance which lands or wealth could sometimes give even then ; for the Lauderdale coffers were not so full as some people thought, and patronage had never yet been sold in *that* family.

Still Madolin's answer was the same—it was not her will to marry.

And that was what she said when the

latest of her suitors came—Colonel Lauderdale, Sir David's namesake and heir, who would have given her the old family title, and made her, by marriage right, the mistress of the ancestral home which now she only held by courtesy, during her father's life.

In vain Sir David remonstrated; in vain the gallant Colonel asked for private interviews; in vain Miss Griselda, who came down from town on purpose, pleaded, pouted, argued, and threatened—Madolin faced them all with the immoveable, rock-like firmness of the Lauderdale, and told them only that it was not her will to marry.

But when she had told them so, she swept away to her own chamber, and there, with tight-clasped hands and in no wise calm face, she watched away a whole long winter night. And her voice went up

through the silent dark in a slow wail which
only Heaven could hear :

“I am aweary, aweary,
I would that I were dead !”

CHAPTER II.

“ I CAN’T square her up nohow, Bessie,” said Jacob Lund, the lodge-keeper, to his wife, as Miss Lauderdale walked past with her father to the little church on the green, listless, uninterested, with neither light of hope nor memory on her pale, proud face. “ I can’t square her up nohow. Seems to me she’s got summut on her mind, else I don’t see no call for her to trail herself along as if she’d all the troubles of Matchborough tied up at the tail of her gown.”

“ She’s been that way, Jacob, ever since the family came back from them there furrin

parts where they was forced to go when Sir David lost his money. Maybe she'd set herself to wed somebody out there, and her father went again' her. The Lauderdale's is a terrible stiff-backed family. They don't talk a deal, but, bless you, they'd go right away to their deaths, every man and woman of 'em that I've set eyes on yet, afore they'd give up their own wills."

"Why don't she face round and get it, then?" said Jacob.

"Get what?—her will? Nay, I don't know for certain as that's it; but there's a summut that don't run easy with her. Law, now! to think of the difference afore she went away, and that's better'n ten years back, just afore little Jack was born, there wasn't a more light-hearted creature in the parish; and ready to keep company with anyone proper—as the times and times I've seen her galloping over the Chase with

the young ladies from the Rectory—poor Parson Bonaway's daughters, you remember, Jacob,—laughing again, and as merry as a cricket. And for temper—her mother over again, as sure as I'm a living woman. My! but if you wanted to see a bit of temper, you'd only need go to Nunthorpe Chase in poor Lady Lauderdale's time."

"I don't need to go so far," said Jacob, drily. "You can give tongue yourself as well as the best of 'em. It don't need big folk to be a bit fond o' their own way, and to show up a bit o' temper, too."

But Jacob's honest grey eyes, as he made this remark, rested on his bonnie middle-aged wife with a half-ashamed acknowledgment of love, which, perhaps, served to make the personality go down comfortably. At any rate, Bessie did not bridle up to any serious extent. She only gave the cups and saucers a little extra rattle as she

put them away in the corner cupboard.

“Well, and what’s a woman good for, I should like to know, if she hasn’t a tongue in her head and a bit of a temper to back it up. I’d as soon see a shorn sheep i’ the March winds as a wife that can’t give back as good as she gets, any day. The law ties them up pretty fast, most ways, but it can’t get hold of their tongues and their tempers; and I say let ’em use ’em while they have ’em. But I never see a woman give loose like Lady Lauderdale yet. You don’t remember her, Jacob; you didn’t use to come about the house so much then—least-ways, only to the back, when you was a-courting of me.”

“Ay, and a rare long time you kept me at it, too,” said Jacob, with a still half-ashamed, half-proud look at his wife—
“seven year and better afore you’d give in to be axed in church, and me coming across

Nunthorpe Common, wet or dry, every night of my life for as much as a kiss at the gate ; and lucky if I got it, too."

"Well, Jacob, and the better for both on us. For wages didn't use to be what they've risen to since ; and if I hadn't stuck to my situation when I lived housemaid at the Chase, and spared and scraped as there isn't a many does now, there'd none have been that fifty pound in the Matchborough Bank to get agate of housekeeping with ; and the big nest of drawers, and the goose feather-bed, and the eight-day clock, as it hasn't missed a tick since it was set a-going on the wedding-day. It isn't you, Jacob, as had ought to say nothing."

"I don't say nothing," replied Jacob, contentedly. "You've been a good wife to me. I wish every man had as good. Only when a fellow knows he's making a good bargain for himself, it nat'rally kind o' riles him

when he can't get it struck right away. And as for the clock, Bessy, why, the time used to go quick enough—we didn't want nothing to help it on. But I don't go against the saving, for all that."

"No, nor hadn't need to," said Bessy, turning her head sharply in the direction of her eldest daughter, a pretty girl of seventeen, who had just come into the kitchen, and was tying on her black straw hat at the little looking-glass over the afore-mentioned "nest" of drawers. "And that's a word on your side of the bridge, miss, for I'd like to see how much you'll lay by against you get a young man to keep company with, and you a-peaking and a-preening of yourself, as if you was a lady born, with your flowers and ribbons and things. Them wasn't the ways when I was a girl, I can tell you, or your father and me might have waited long enough before we got settled with furniture

as there don't need to be no better in the parish."

"Nay, mother, let her alone," said Jacob, soothingly, glancing with a father's pride at his pretty Theresa, or Tossie, as they generally called her, standing there before the looking-glass, and holding her head coquettishly on one side, to see the effect of the new hat; "it isn't often she gets a chance to put her best things on. I lay you liked to smarten yourself up when you was a girl, as well as the best of 'em. What did cost, honey?" he continued, taking hold of the hat and dangling it on his big thumb.

"Nothing at all, father," said Tossie, triumphantly; "and so mother needn't have a deal to say about me not saving. It's my old hat as I had last summer, with the brim pinched in a bit, same as I've seen 'em on Matchborough market-day; and the ribbon I've sponged up with black tea; and the

rose Miss Tippet gave me—she that's maid up at the Chase."

"And more to blame she," said inexorable Mrs. Lund, "to set you up with such trumpery, when she might see well enough your head's turned round, if you can only get a bit of something smart to stick on it. Anybody might think you wasn't your own mother's child, to see you wasting your time that way, and me toiling and moiling in the house, as they needn't talk about black slaves while I'm here to show 'em what a Christian woman has to do."

"Well, mother," said Tossie, with a shrug of her pretty sloping shoulders, "I don't want to be idle—I've said over and over again I'll go and wait in a shop any day, if you'll find me a place convenient; and I always get the children off to their school; and I've trimmed your best bonnet up for you this year, so as Miss Tippet herself says

you wouldn't get much change out of half a sovereign if you had it to buy in Matchborough. I don't think you've a need to fly at me for being idle, that way."

"No, Bessy, honey," urged soft-hearted Jacob, evidently perplexed between love for Tossie and fear of his ready-tongued but valuable wife. "If she takes it off one way, she puts it on another, and that evens it, in a manner, as you may say. There, Tossie; you'd best be going, or you'll happen fall late for church, and that don't look well for such as you."

Jacob gave the girl a kindly nod as she disappeared, readily enough, with her prayer-book. Poor girl! she was often thankful to find relief in the outward means of grace from the incessant reproof to which her pretty face and somewhat slovenly household ways subjected her. And Jacob, lighting his pipe, stood at the lodge door,

ready, in case the storm should wax louder, to make a retreat outward, down some of the woodland paths; or, should it lull, to return to the pleasures of domestic intercourse.

“You’d best not be over hard upon her, Bessy honey. She’s that sort as don’t do to be driven. If you give her a touch too much, she’ll maybe fling up, and it’ll go hard with her.”

“It’ll go harder still if you let her alone, Jacob. I’m surprised at you! As long as the bairn looks pretty you don’t think o’ naught else. I lay if my mother hadn’t kep’ a straight hand on me when I’d as bonnie a face to bless myself with, I shouldn’t have been much of a wife for you, and vittles the price they are now, and butcher meat that dear you may think yourself lucky to get it three times a week. And talk of waiting in a shop, indeed!—as I wonder you could

stand still and hear her say it, and you turned fifty, and knowing what a place Matchborough is, as a pretty face can't walk down its streets in peace and quiet. A fine thing for a girl that's been taught to behave herself decently and respectably, to be stuck up there behind a counter, for every jack-anapes as wants a pennorth of tape to come in and stare at. No, Mr. Lund, wait till I'm safe in my grave, if you please, and then send Tossie to wait in a shop, if you think it would be such a mighty fine thing for the girl."

"I don't remember as I ever said it 'ud be a mighty fine thing for the girl," said Jacob, with a dubious glance down the nearest woodland path. Perhaps it would be best to go in that direction, after all. "It was her own thought, and there's a-many does it now-a-days, when wages isn't to call high. But if she isn't no use to

you in the house, why don't you put her out maid-of-all-work somewhere, or get her took in at the Chase—she's had her mind set that way, too, a good bit past."

"Maid-of-all-work, indeed, Jacob! I wonder you're not ashamed of yourself, to smoke your pipe there and say such a thing, and leave me here with the work, as it's scarce ever a minute I get to sit me down and rest. I'd like to know who'd see after getting Jack off to school, and making his few bits of things for him, bless him! and do the light end of the dusting, and that sort, if Tossie's handed off to a maid-of-all-work place. But it's always the way with the men—they never have no sense about nothing."

And then, seeing that she had, like many another irritable and quick-tongued woman, faced round upon her own previous position, and knocked it down, Mrs.

Lund adroitly changed the conversation.

“But I don’t say nothing—it’ll right itself; only leave it alone, as I’ve heard tell that were poor Sir David’s way when my lady was in her tantrums; not but what she was always kind enough to me, because with me being took in maid while mother was housekeeper at the Chase, it wasn’t like coming in a stranger. But save us, if there ever was a bonnie woman with a bonnie temper, that was my Lady Lauderdale. I’ve heard tell most of them Spanish folks has a deal of spirit in ’em, and if they’re all like her, I’m thankful I was born in my own country, and so there’s an end. For as proud a man as he is, I’ve seen Sir David shake in his shoes—ay, that I have, when Lady Lauderdale got fired up about anything as she couldn’t have her own way in.”

“Ay, they’re a awkward thing, is a woman

when you get hold of 'em wrong way," said Jacob, sententiously, coming back with his pipe, now that the storm had veered round, and settling himself down in the chimney corner. "You may talk, and you may talk, but after all you must let 'em have their way."

"Yes, and my lady got it, too. She had a flash with her eyes as a man couldn't stand against, and that sort of look as, if she'd had a dagger anywhere handy, she wouldn't have stuck at using it. I could tell you a deal, Jacob, if I was a woman that talked; but nobody has it to say of me that I'm given to such like, or I shouldn't have kept my situation at Nunthorpe Chase fifteen year from the time I was took in maid under my mother, and the servants coming and going like chickens in and out of a coop, with my lady's temper. But my mother always said to me, 'Bessy,' she used to say, 'stop

where you are—it'll be best for you in the end. A girl as has been at the Chase fifteen year can put her foot pretty well where she likes after that.' And a true word, too, for if I hadn't married you, Jacob, there's many and many a county family about here would been glad enough to have had me, and good wage, and everything found. But I don't complain."

Jacob, puffing away at his pipe, and meditating upon a row of brightly-polished tin candlesticks and saucepan lids upon the chimneypiece, didn't complain either. And Bessy continued—

"Miss Madolin was her mother over again, every bit, while they went away abroad, to save, when Sir David lost his money. Such a spirit and a temper; and always for racing and galloping about up and down the park with them young ladies from the Rectory, as they're both of 'em

married and done for now, poor things! and a smile for everybody, let 'em be as poor as they might; and as long as you didn't cross her, the best of dispositions. But just say her nay when she'd set her mind on ought, and then wait a bit and you'd see. I've known her and Miss Griselda, when the old lady's been at her to be a bit steadier, and I should say a young tigress would about have matched it. And now, if you want to see the difference, you've only to look."

And Bessy jerked her elbow in the direction of Nunthorpe village green, across which, half an hour before, Sir David and Miss Madolin had walked, slightly apart from each other; he silent, stately, self-absorbed; she careless, indifferent, purposeless; her long garments trailing over the fallen leaves, her small black-gloved hands loosely folded, her brown shadowy eyes

looking straight on, with no light or sweetness in their gaze.

“And never nobody coming to the place, and the horses eating their heads off in the stable, and no dancing nor nothing in the great gallery, as I’ve seen it in Lady Lauderdale’s time, when you couldn’t count ’em with their laces and their satins and their diamonds; and the supper set out in the crimson dining-room, with such a sight of plate as it might have done anybody’s eyes good to see. And it isn’t Sir David’s fault as they don’t come the same now, nor Miss Griselda’s neither, for the old lady always puts her best foot forward to get a bit of a spread when she comes to the Chase. She’s a rare one is Miss Griselda for making Sir David’s money fly; and people are glad enough to get asked to such a house. It’s Miss Lauderdale does it, that’s where it is; but the why and the wherefore’s beyond you and me, Jacob.”

Jacob puffed away silently as ever, only just taking his pipe out to say—

“I can’t square her up, nohow.”

Meanwhile Madolin and her father sat in the Chase pew, with plenty of crimson cushions to make them comfortable, and silken curtains closely drawn around, that the village folks should not inquire too rudely into their devotions. Madolin went to church regularly every Sunday morning, and said her prayers out of a great book, with the Lauderdale crest upon its cover; but for eight long years the empty-hearted woman had never prayed at all, save that God would take from her the life which was a weariness unto her.

CHAPTER III.

SIR DAVID was a middle-aged man when he came into possession of the Lauderdale title and estates. Having at the outset of life but the slender expectations of a younger son, he had been sent into the Army, and was engaged for some time in foreign service. During one of his campaigns, when he was long past the heyday of youth, he met a Spanish girl named Madolin Alvara, fell in love with her, sold out of the Army, got a Government appointment abroad, married, and settled down to such happiness as the middle-aged husband

of a beautiful, jealous, passionate, imperious girl may be expected to enjoy.

Ten years after this, his eldest brother dying unmarried, Captain, now Sir David Lauderdale, came to England to take possession of Nunthorpe Chase, bringing with him his splendid wife and their only child, a bright little brunette of six or seven years.

Lady Lauderdale did not live long to enjoy the privileges of her new social position. Having by turns scolded, stormed, and sulked at her husband, until she had changed him from a frank, good-tempered man of the world, into a grave, silent recluse; and having succeeded in thoroughly spoiling the little Madolin, to whom she had given her own temper with more than her own beauty, the Spaniard died, and was buried amongst the dusty Lauderdale, in Nunthorpe village church. Unrestful surroundings, truly, those carven canopies and

stony faces and hands, for ever clasped, as in prayer, for her on whose grave the myrtle should have blossomed, and the orange dropped its white leaves in her own sunny land.

Then Sir David's maiden sister, majestic Miss Griselda Lauderdale, came to live with her brother, and try what could be done towards bringing little Miss Madolin into something like wholesome restraint.

That was not much. Miss Griselda was a Lauderdale herself, stiff-backed as any of them; but the strong marble of her character was cracked through and through with little womanish foibles and pettinesses, which Madolin was quick to see and powerful to resist. Tolerably good-hearted, but very pompous, bound in meekest slavery to the creeds and customs of her own little set, a Tory of the Tories, excellently kind and patronizing to everyone beneath her, so long

as the iron bars of position were kept intact, but horrified beyond measure if struggling worth or intellect had the audacity to vault over them, Miss Griselda was very unfit to deal with a girl in whom liberty was an instinct, and who knew no law but her own will. To that will Sir David's sister could oppose one equally strong, though far from equally subtle; but of passion, that white heat of southern fire which quivered and blazed in the young heart of her niece, poor Miss Griselda knew nothing at all. It astonished her; she was powerless to guide it.

So were governesses, so were tutors, so was even Sir David himself, when he attempted it. But he seldom did attempt it. He had entered Parliament soon after the death of his wife, and was rarely at home now, except for a few weeks in the late summer, when Madolin's pretty petulant

ways, her ripe, girlish beauty, mingling the Alvara colour and warmth with the severe chiselled contour of the Lauderdale type, even her passion and imperiousness, made her rather fascinating than otherwise to the tired politician.

At eighteen Madolin was the idol of all the county families round Nunthorpe Chase. Society forgives everything to a beautiful, dashing, high-spirited girl. It will overlook bad temper and selfishness, or even turn them into additional attractions, when the eyes out of which they show themselves are so gloriously bright, and the cheeks on which they flush round as the peach and soft as the roseleaf. Madolin queened it at all the out-door gatherings, archery meetings, and boating parties which were got up by Miss Griselda's set. Everyone said what a brilliant match the girl would make one of these days, with that splendid face and

glorious spirit of hers. And the old aunt, who exulted in her niece's beauty as much as she dreaded her imperious temper, was already beginning to look forward with secret triumph to the excitement which Madolin would create when she was presented at Court, and took her place in society, and brought to her feet even its most *blasé* aristocrats, who could not but be conquered by a face and manner which linked southern fire to northern stateliness.

But Madolin was not destined to kiss the hand of Royalty, and dazzle the eyes of the fashionable world, and then, at the close of her first season, step supreme into her carriage, a bride, in all the glories of orange blossom and Honiton lace. Whilst Miss Griselda was making the necessary arrangements for joining her brother in his town house, preparatory to the young lady's presentation, the Matchborough Bank, in which

most of Sir David's fortune was locked up, stopped payment. Large sums had been forged upon it by the chief cashier, a man named Jetsam, who had made his escape, and was supposed to be somewhere in hiding on the Continent. Sir David was so deeply involved in the downfall that nothing remained but for him to break up his establishments, both in town and country, let the Chase furnished, find a quiet home for Aunt Griselda and Madolin somewhere abroad, and go into apartments in London until his affairs were sufficiently settled for him to make a home for his family again.

So Nunthorpe was let to a wealthy coal and timber merchant, and Madolin, instead of a court-train, had a travelling-dress prepared for her, and the orders which had been given for the refitting of the town house were countermanded, and, instead, arrangements made for a speedy packing-up

and removal to Heidelberg, where apartments had been taken for them at one of the best *pensions*.

Miss Griselda took her brother's misfortunes sorely to heart. Never, since the first Sir Guy built for himself a home there, had Nunthorpe Chase wanted a Lauderdale to keep due state beneath its roof. Though not so wealthy as many of the mushroom aristocracy of the neighbourhood, the Chase people had always held their place proudly enough at the head of the county society. Now, for strangers, vulgar merchants without a pedigree, people who had grown rich through coal and timber, to tread those polished satin floors, which hitherto none but Lauderdale feet had paced, and gather round the ample firesides which had flashed their light upon none but Lauderdale faces, and dispread their capacious persons on the couches whose downy pillows had yielded to

the touch of none but Lauderdale loveliness —Miss Griselda shed tears at the thought.

Madolin took things more philosophically. Life at Nunthorpe Chase had never quite contented her ; neither, she thought, would London life, with its added burden of state and ceremonial, be much better. She had heard, read of Heidelberg. It was a pleasant place. Society was not so formal as in England. People could do as they liked there, go where they liked, visit whom they chose. Aunt Griselda would not need to be always reining her up, reminding her of her position, coming down upon her with traditions of Lauderdale grandeur. She would be able to have her own way a little more, shake off the dust of country exclusiveness, and look with her own great bright eyes into a world whose ways and woes and wickednesses had hitherto been carefully kept from her. Heidelberg would not be

so bad after all. And then it was only for three years. Papa said his affairs would most likely have come right by that time. They should save no end of money by going to the Continent, and be able, perhaps, to spend as much as ever they liked when they came home. Only she hoped in the meantime some one would catch that villain Jetsam, and visit upon him the due reward of his evil deeds.

“If I could find him, Auntie Grisel, I would like to take hold of him like this—look !”

And Madolin clutched her little white throat with her jewelled fingers.

“And I would keep him fast, until there was no breath left in him. I would, Auntie, there then ; and so you need not look so shocked at me.”

“My dear,” said Sir David’s excellent sister, “such feelings are not for people of

our class. So long as the purposes of justice are answered, it is needless for us to sully our minds by thinking of the vile wretch who has done us so much mischief. I beg you will not mention his name in my presence again."

Though, at the same time, if Auntie Grisel had known that Jetsam was to be executed at Newgate prison in a still more ignominious fashion than that which Madolin had suggested, she would have been abundantly content. That was quite different from cherishing vindictive feelings in one's own mind.

So Sir David took the ladies to Heidelberg, established them in private apartments in one of the best *pensions* of the town, staid with them until they had gathered round them a comfortable little circle of friends, and then came back to his solitary London chambers, to live there as quietly

and inexpensively as he could, until such time as Nunthorpe Chase might own him for its master again.

CHAPTER IV.

THE three years were nearly over. They had been more formidable in prospect than reality. Even Miss Griselda was constrained to say that Continental life had its bright side, for she was quite the Empress of the *pension*. Everyone did obeisance to the stately old English *miladi*. She had the best seat at the dinner-table, the warmest corner in the drawing-room, the sunniest or the shadiest place on terrace and lawn, as weather might make sun or shade desirable. Some officious widower or polite elderly gentleman was always ready to dis-

entangle the interminable strips of parti-coloured knitting which she was in the habit of carrying about with her, and which were everlastingly catching upon door-handles, or table ornaments, or other people's buttons; and Miss Griselda bowed so graciously when they were restored to her. She had not even yet forgotten the time when she, too, wrinkled now, and puckered, and withered, and mildewed, and outworn, was one of the queens of society, and could have had her choice, had she not, perhaps, as she said sometimes with a smile, been over-fastidious in her likes and dislikes. But then the Lauderdales were always such a proud family.

Madolin, too, liked it. If the *pension* did obeisance to the elder lady, it did homage to the younger one, whose bright, flashing, passionate beauty was even more rare at Heidelberg than amongst English

county aristocracy. Madolin loved music; there were out-door concerts without number during the sweet summer evenings. Madolin loved display; there were private theatricals got up at the *pension* for her especial benefit, at which she took the principal parts, and dazzled her audience, now as a princess, now as a gipsy queen, now as an Oriental bride, now as a fascinating little coquette, now as a stately Italian Contessa. Madolin loved amusement; there were snug dances in the drawing-room, private and public balls in the town, boating parties, hunting parties; she had but to give the word, and pic-nics, any number of them, were got up for her, where everyone was ready to dance attendance upon her for the favour of a smile. And if Auntie Grisel always found some elderly widower to rescue her strips of coloured knitting, Madolin had but to drop a glove, a handkerchief, a

bouquet, and the room was in a tumult, a perfect rush of cavaliers took place, and happy he who replaced the trifle in her careless hand. Oh! it was a pleasant life for Princess Madolin.

And no satiety in it, either. For no sooner had she wearied of the too manifest devotion of one set of admirers than chance or fortune drifted them away, and others took their place, to do homage to the brilliant young Queen of the *pension*—to do homage and offer their hearts too. Madolin liked that very well. Nothing pleased her better than to smile upon a bearded German, or swarthy Italian, or dainty English *milord*, until she had brought him to his knees before her, and then, with a smile just as sweet, dismiss him, saying he had “misunderstood” her—she had only wished him for a friend. As a friend she still desired that he should linger in

her presence ; but for other than that——

Then Madolin let the suitor press her white hand, and utter a few words of passionate farewell ; and next day a place was empty at the long table, and one more unfortunate had temporarily lost his faith in women-kind, and Madolin smiled as brightly as ever. What was it all to her ? She cared for none of these things.

Until one day, when the three years of Aunt Griselda's proposed residence at Heidelberg had nearly come to an end, a Swedish gentleman, Gustave Nilken by name, as the visitors' book showed, took his place in the drawing-room. A fair-haired man, quiet of manner, grave of face, with keen grey-blue eyes, which seemed to see everything, but told no story of their own. He was travelling in Germany, he said, for the sake of learning the language. He seemed to have a facility in such learning,

for he spoke English almost like a native—a fact which was explained by his having been for several years at school in London, and afterwards mixing much with English merchants in his own country. But apparently he intended to learn German rather by listening than by speaking, for his words were very few, and he seemed to court acquaintance with no one. The quietest man they had ever seen, but gentlemanly withal, said the ladies of the *pension*, though lacking that indefinable something which all over the world marks a man of high breeding. Another conquest for my lady Madolin? Nay, not so, for Gustave showed little readiness to fall into the train of the splendid brunette. He appeared quite content to admire at a distance, a mode of admiration to which Madolin was unaccustomed, and of which she decidedly disapproved. At least, she disapproved of it until the ad-

mirer had asked permission to sun himself in the royal presence. After asking that, and being, of course, refused, he might retire into the distance as much as he liked, to make room for fresh worshippers.

Gustave Nilken's offence was that, after two or three weeks at the *pension*, and sundry glances from Madolin's bright eyes, intended as intimations that she was "at home" to his homage, he was still content to look upon her as an interesting study of maidenhood, fair to see, but in no way essential to his happiness. Madolin sang; he never offered to turn over the leaves for her. Madolin sat upon the lawn; he never brought rugs and cushions to protect her from the cold. Madolin announced her intention of taking a stroll in the woods; he did not offer himself as an escort. Madolin assumed the *rôle* of bride in private theatricals; Gustave was never found amongst the

shoal of amateurs who expressed their desire to act the part of bridegroom. Madolin complained of the heat; other people might rush to open the window, or bring fans and vinaigrette, Gustave never did, only amused himself by noting how the proud girl chafed at his neglect, and how she was beginning to despise her other admirers, because this stranger would not come into their midst.

Wise Gustave! prudent Gustave! If, from the very first, his object had been to arouse the interest of Sir David Lauderdale's beautiful daughter, he could not have gained it more successfully. His assumed indifference did more for him than the studious homage of all the rest of the people. Madolin, finding she was not sought, began to play the perilous game of seeking. Influence, at any rate, she must have, and submission she must win; but she

bought them both at the price of what in those days she fancied was her own heart's love.

For soon a pang of jealousy, quite new and strange to her, quivered through every fibre if Gustave smiled on other than herself. A meaning look, a delicate little touch of flattery, a graceful compliment bestowed upon some flaxen-haired *Fräulein* or well-dowered English maiden, could tighten Madolin's lips for a whole evening, and bend her brows into disdainful curves, and tinge with bitter meaning every word she said. A glance of his blue eyes could win her away whithersoever he went; a gentle touch of his hand, would he but give it as they sauntered through the woods, or passed each other in the dance, made her heart beat, and the warm light burn within her eyes. Perhaps Gustave knew that, too. Few things escaped his quiet observance.

And was not Madolin rich—likely to be so, at least—the only child of a country gentleman whose name was not entirely unfamiliar? Gustave used to walk up and down under the linden-trees after nightfall, always after nightfall, and stroke his moustache, and think of these things.

Next day there would be just a touch of devotion in his manner to the haughty beauty. He would win her by some trifling attention, which from him meant so much. Then he would excite her jealousy by compliments paid in another direction, then bring back the sunshine by a tender word or two. So, little by little, the game fell into his own hands. It was no longer his part, but Madolin's, to be moved, to wait for a smile, to be humble, obedient, watchful. And still the cold blue eyes gave no sign to anyone else, and still Gustave held himself apart, and was apparently so ab-

sorbed in making himself master of that difficult accomplishment—a knowledge of the German language.

By-and-by Miss Griselda awoke to the fact that something more serious than one of Madolin's ordinary flirtations was altering the girl's manner so, making her more than usually irritable, wayward, passionate, and capricious; and the good lady determined to put an end to it. Madolin might amuse herself a little in that way if she liked, well and good. She might break a few hearts, well and good, too; most handsome girls did that more than once before their own were taken captive in love's gentle thrall. Even if she won away an honest lover from some less-favoured maiden, who, before her coming to Heidelberg, had held him all her own, that was not of so very much consequence. Such things happened every day in good society. Might she not have been

a bride herself, many and many a year ago, if a fairer, not to say a sweeter, had not stepped before her and borne away the prize upon which she had set her mind? Let the Heidelberg maidens, then, and the belles of the Pension, look after themselves, they were no concern of hers. But that her niece Madolin, the only child of Sir David Lauderdale, of Nunthorpe Chase, should be caught by a man with no introductions, a man who, though apparently well-read and tolerably gentlemanly, and speaking English with wonderful accuracy for a foreigner, had still a smirch of mercantile transactions about him, and might be, for anything she knew to the contrary, a penniless adventurer—that was a degradation not to be thought of. It must be put a stop to without delay.

And Miss Griselda, by way of putting a stop to it, did the foolishest thing that ever

aunt of a headstrong, wilful, impetuous girl stumbled upon. For instead of sending for Sir David to fetch away his mischievous daughter, or quietly packing her own port-manteau and then giving the girl marching orders, excellent Miss Griselda beckoned Madolin with great solemnity into her dressing-room, locked the door, drew down the blinds, placed a couple of chairs opposite each other in front of the stove, and bidding her niece be seated on one, took the other herself, and forthwith launched into the solemnities of a set exhortation. She held up before the girl in a variety of lights the folly, not to say enormity, of her conduct, in allowing herself to encourage the attentions of a man who, whatever his social qualifications might be, could not certainly give her that place in the fashionable world to which her birth entitled her. She drew upon her imagination for exaggerated pic-

tures of the degradation which Madolin would sustain by marrying beneath her own rank. She even went out of her way to blacken poor Nilken's character—a needless piece of spitefulness on the old lady's part, seeing that the man had conducted himself quietly enough since his stay in the *pension*,—conjuring up visions of deserted wives in various Continental towns, and possible domestic and matrimonial complications which might arise when it was too late to have them remedied. When Aunt Griselda began to blacken, Madolin began to storm. What right had her aunt to say such things of a man about whom she knew nothing, save that for three weeks he had conducted himself as a gentleman in the same house with themselves? What had she done now, worse than she had been doing for the last three years, during which time no one had thought it necessary to pull

her up, or find any fault with her? Besides, had she ever said that she meant to marry Gustave Nilken, or wanted to marry him, or behaved in such a way as to make him believe that she would marry him, if he asked her, that Aunt Griselda should take the trouble to set in order such an array of disgusting possibilities? As if any Lauderdale girl ever had brought discredit upon her father's house, or linked her name with one that was not worthy to stand side by side with it, in life and death!

And Madolin's eyes flashed, and her black brows knotted in to uneven lines, and she stamped impatiently with her little feet on the polished floor. Talk to her indeed, bid her be prudent, mindful of the honour of her race! Let them leave that to herself!

Then Aunt Griselda began to storm too, after her funny, spiteful, illogical way of

storming, which had the effect of making Madolin calm, immovable as a rock. Expostulation always roused her into passion, whilst the passion of others steadied her back again into scornful quiet. However, the end of it all was that she promised to consider the matter, and not give Gustave Nilken any further encouragement. With which promise Aunt Griselda was content, drew up the blind, unlocked the door, dismissed her niece, and fondly imagined that all was right.

CHAPTER V.

THAT a member of the grand old Lauderdale family could make a promise and not keep it was a possibility which never suggested itself to the mind of Sir David's worthy sister. She forgot that the blood of the crafty Spaniard mingled with the noble English life in Madolin's veins; that passion capable of crouching like a tiger, and jealousy, cruel as an adder's sting, lay hidden beneath the pride and lofty self-restraint which she inherited from her father.

Madolin spoke no word, but swept calmly

out of her aunt's presence. Just a few more interviews, with low-spoken words and half-averted looks, took place between her and Gustave Nilken; a few more walks under the linden-trees, when Aunt Griselda imagined her preparing for her part in a charade, or writing letters to her English friends; and then, about three weeks after that momentous dressing-room interview, she went out one fine morning, met Gustave at a little distance from the town, was privately married to him, and, after the ceremony, came quietly home, having slipped the wedding-ring into her purse. Nilken parted from her at the door, having business matters to arrange at Homberg, which would occupy him for perhaps a week. At the end of that time he should return to Heidelberg, claim his splendid bride, spite of father, aunt, or all the world, and bear her triumphantly away to the Swedish home, where

she was to reign queen-mistress over him for the rest of their lives.

For awhile after that all went on pleasantly enough. The guests generally regretted Monsieur Nilken's departure—he was so quiet, inoffensive, unassuming. Miss Griselda exulted over it. Madolin had most likely dismissed him in consequence of those remarks of hers in the dressing-room. The girl really had a great deal of common sense, where personal position was involved. How glad she was now that she had not made a fuss over it, said anything to the other visitors, written to Sir David, or hurried their departure from Heidelberg, since they were not likely to meet with a pleasanter residence anywhere else. Madolin certainly, she must say, seemed to feel his absence, was not quite so vivacious, did not care to have such a train of admirers round her, had almost, at times, a touch of pre-

occupation about her, a sort of absent-mindedness, as if she were remembering and regretting. But that would soon pass away; no need to trouble about that. Besides, Sir David would soon be coming to take them back to Nunthorpe Chase, and then everything would be all right again.

So that week wore to its close, and Gustave did not return; and a second week wore to its close, and still Gustave did not return. And proud Miss Lauderdale, who had vowed a wife's love and duty, and who carried her wedding-ring now in a little golden locket round her neck, began to wonder when those affairs at Homberg would be settled. She had grown rather tired of picturing to herself with what magnificent pride, when Gustave came back, she would present him to her aunt as her husband, the man of her choice, for whom she was content to forsake the possible

splendours of London society, and banish herself to a sort of limited monarchy in that far-off land of dairy-maids and reindeer. But still, of course, everything was all right. He had said he might possibly be detained a day or two longer. Her papa was sometimes kept for weeks in town when he only expected to be absent a few days. It could not but be all right.

So Madolin, to pass the time, dashed into excitement again, brought a dozen sighing admirers to her feet, smiled, first upon one, then upon another of them; Miss Griselda the while, though not quite able to justify such conduct, glad to see that darling Madolin had recovered her spirits. And dances and theatricals and pic-nics, which had been slightly languishing during Miss Lauderdale's marriage week, burst out in more glorious abundance than ever.

Until one morning, when Madolin's secret

was about three weeks old, Aunt Griselda brought into the drawing-room, where a gay party of the *pension* people were assembled—her niece, as usual the bright, particular star of the company—a long letter from Sir David Lauderdale.

“Now, Madolin,” she said, triumphantly, whilst any quantity of strips of gay-coloured knitting fluttered behind her, catching in door-handles and gentleman’s buttons, “you have attained your wish at last.”

“My wish, Auntie Grisel?” replied the flashing brunette, turning the light of her countenance away for an instant from a gentleman who had been basking in it all day,—“my wish? I don’t think I happen to have any wishes just now.”

“Indeed! Don’t you remember saying, long ago, how you wished that villain Jetsam might be found out and punished?”

“Oh, yes,” said Madolin, with a gesture

of infinite contempt, "I had almost forgotten the wretch!"

"Then, my dear, as it happens, you have a very short memory, for he was in this house, though we did not know it at the time, only a month ago. Who do you think he is proved to be?"

And Aunt Griselda looked about on the company with the complacency of a well-bred British woman, who has a sensation to make; also with a private glance of supreme exultation at Madolin, as much as to say,—
"I told you so; see what you might have done for yourself by disobeying me."

"Who, indeed, but our delightful Swedish friend, who was arrested at Homberg ten days ago. He is not a Swede at all, but a fellow named Jetsam, an Englishman, cashier of the bank at Matchborough; and for three years, ever since he committed all those forgeries, the detectives have been on

his track. He is safely lodged, now, in Newgate gaol, and Sir David says the sentence cannot be less than transportation for life."

It was not the way of the Lauderdales to shriek or scream or faint when anything happened to them. The Spartan lad, who let the fox gnaw its way through to his heart rather than betray himself, had not more heroism than Gideon Jetsam's wife.

"How very strange," she said, and then went on turning over the pages of "Don Giovanni," out of which she and the English gentleman had been practising duets most of the morning.

The rest of the company expressed their opinions more unreservedly.

"Audacious, insufferable creature!" said Mrs. Regison, an officer's widow, who had been living at the *pension* a year, with a rather elderly unmarried daughter. "And

to think of our behaving to him as an equal. I declare it is enough to make us all afraid of each other !”

“ Oh ! mamma, dear, don’t say so,” lisped Gertrude, the elderly and unmarried. “ It sounds so very unkind to everybody else ; and I am sure we are always delightfully comfortable together. But do you know, from the very first, I had my doubts about that man—he never seemed to me to have the air and bearing of a gentleman.”

“ Dear me,” said Miss Maxfield, another elderly *habitué*, “ you astonish me !” I always fancied you took so kindly to Monsieur Nilken. Indeed, one might have thought—”

“ It was mere kindness,” said Miss Gertrude, with dignity. “ I am seldom deceived in my estimate of character.”

“ Oh ! well, of course a great many people *are* attentive out of mere kindness, and I always say it is very good of them—very

good indeed. But, Miss Griselda, I read him so correctly from the first that I never even went so far as to be kind to him. I felt sure there was something wrong with him, because he never looked anyone in the face."

"And had such an unmistakable flavour of the shop about him," said a gentleman, leaving his newspaper, and joining the little group round Miss Griselda. It was astonishing how the evidences of poor Gustave's guilt and want of gentlemanliness were accumulating, now that the truth was really found out. "Anyone might have told what he had been accustomed to, from the way he counted out his money. I am glad to say I never encouraged him in the least."

"A queer thing that none of us found him out," said a dry little German. "For my part—and I have been over the world a

good deal—I thought him a very decent sort of fellow.”

“Of course,” answered Miss Griselda, impatiently, giving her wool-work a twitch which fastened it upon one of the little German’s buttons—“of course we might be supposed to think that of anyone who came into a house like this. We are not accustomed to look upon each other as rogues and thieves and vagabonds. I did have *my* doubts, though, and I expressed them in private, and the event has proved me correct. I can only say I was very glad when he took his departure. I mistrusted him from the very first.”

“A quiet, inoffensive fellow, though,” said the *basso* of “Don Giovanni,” “and tolerably well informed. I am sure, to hear him speak of his travels, you must have had the impression that he was a very clever man. Miss Lauderdale, do you not remember how

one evening we enjoyed his description of those Norwegian fiords, and afterwards—”

But Miss Lauderdale had stepped silently out of the drawing-room whilst the little German was disentangling his buttons from Aunt Griselda’s wool-work.

CHAPTER VI.

SHE went into her own room, a little boudoir opening out of Miss Griselda's apartment, and there looked her life steadily in the face.

Higher than the Spanish fury rose the English pride of her nature. Her secret was her own. None need know the horrible misery and disgrace which she had brought upon herself. That was the first thought which nerved her to bear all the rest. Worse than any amount of suffering was the pity of society, the kindly condolences of friends who would hasten to sympathise

with her as a deceived and injured woman. That at least she could avoid, that she would never allow.

One wild thought flashed across her mind. They were going back to England in a week or two. She would get an order from a magistrate, gain admittance to the gaol, pour out upon her villain husband's head the storm of her indignation, cover him with reproach, scorn, contempt, and then leave him to his fate.

But no. The wrong that had been done to her had this sting in it, the bitterest sting of all, that revenge was utterly hopeless. This man whom she despised had her life in his power. One little word from him could crush her into the dust. To open the flood-gates of her anger would have been to betray herself to the world. In silence only was her strength, and Madolin resolved to be silent.

Well, let her. She had had her lightning-flash of joy, and it had burnt up all her life, left nothing but a grey scorching pathway of ashes through the long years of her lonely womanhood, until she or Gideon Jetsam should die. She would bear it quietly. She would make no sign. No one need know that Sir David Lauderdale's only child was a thief's deserted wife. Jetsam, if not goaded to it by her reproaches, would never tell the truth. It would do him no good. It would only increase his chances of conviction.

And if he should not be convicted. If the law, finding no plea against him, gave him back to society, and to his wife—sweet gift!

Madolin ground her teeth. Good. She could but die. She would not be the first of her mother's race who had bidden steel or poison do the work of death before its

time ; and the grave would be far better than life with him.

She did not much reproach herself. The Lauderdale people rarely felt their faults, still more rarely owned them. She never remembered the winning looks, the brilliant smiles, the subtle, tender tones, the lingering hand-touches with which she had sought to beguile the fair-haired Swede, sought the more earnestly because at first he had seemed to slight her. She never cursed the spark of foolish fancy which, fanned by his indifference and her jealousy into a flame of passion, had now blasted all her life, and turned her love to hate, hate which, having no way to spend itself, must burn on for ever in her own heart. She had been wronged, and the bitterness of the wrong was coming all upon herself. She had been deceived and betrayed, and what was there left for her but to hide these things from

the world, and be Madolin Lauderdale still, proud, and brave, and self-reliant, still a lady in her own and her father's right, so long as the terrible secret was undiscovered?

She made her appearance next morning as usual, took her part in the breakfast-table conversation, read the English and German papers, which contained the account of Jetsam's arrest, but refrained from expressing an opinion upon it, feeling annoyed, no doubt, as Miss Griselda concluded, that a man upon whom she had been foolish enough to bestow even a passing preference, had turned out so disgracefully. Besides, Madolin was very proud, could not bear to be told that her judgment was in the wrong; and so, of course, having made such a mistake as this, and having, at last, found out that her discernment of character was not quite so infallible as she believed it to be,

she would naturally feel irritated, and resent even the least allusion to the subject in her presence. Aunt Griselda could, therefore, quite account for any little outbreaks of ill-temper, sullenness, or reserve which might occur during the remainder of their stay at Heidelberg.

Fortunately, that stay was not very long. The Regisons and two or three other people, who had been Miss Griselda's chief friends at the *pension*, left soon after Jetsam's affair. She did not care to prolong her own stay, and that being the case, it was easy to convince herself that a change would be good for her niece. So Sir David was written to, arrangements were made for their departure, and, within a month of "that disgraceful affair," as Miss Griselda ever afterwards called it, they returned to Nunthorpe Chase—the house having been vacated some time before by the coal and

timber people, and put into complete order for its rightful owners.

And the bells of the parish church were rung, and the simple village folk, who loved their landlord well, gathered in little groups along the roadside with shouts of welcome, and over the park gates an arch of laurel was hung, and a band of music played upon the green, and Sir David bowed, and Aunt Griselda smiled for once all over her stiff, stately old face; and none knew, and none could have told, from cramp of pain or line of care upon her proud forehead, that Miss Lauderdale, who had left the Chase three years ago, a bright, dashing, wilful, high-spirited girl, was coming back to it at one-and-twenty, a woman seared and scarred and embittered, with no longer any hope or promise in her life, nor any peace, save such as she could make for herself by sweet and self-denying deeds; and such deeds, alas!

were all strange enough to the lady of Nunthorpe Chase.

Considerably changed, the county people said one to another when the congratulatory calls had been made—quite a different manner about her, and, if they might say what they thought, perhaps just a little too stiff and stately for so young a girl. Though that might only be the result of three years of *pension* life. Of course people were obliged to hold themselves rather apart at such places, for they never knew whom they might meet, or what they might get drawn into.

And what a curious thing that, of all men in the world, the Lauderdale should have stumbled upon that fellow Jetsam ; quite a romance, only such a very unpleasant one ! It must have been a great shock to them when the truth came out. And so annoying, actually to have gone into public with

him, as Miss Griselda said, and received attentions from him as if he was one of their own class. But that was Miss Lauderdale's fault, no doubt. It always had been her weak point to be a little too fond of admiration, and most likely she had had a train of men after her at Heidelberg, and encouraged them and amused herself with them as used to be the case at Nunthorpe Chase years before. But this unpleasant occurrence would be a lesson to her, and, even if she purchased prudence at the expense of a little of that fine, dashing impetuosity which used to be so fascinating—well, so much the better.

Thus the county people one to another, after having welcomed the Lauderdale's back to the Chase.

Excellent Miss Griselda did not stay there very long. Madolin was old enough now, and dignified and stately enough too,

to assume the position of lady of the house. Moreover, it was not in her disposition to brook the continual dropping of her aunt's sage experiences, nor those airs of superiority which elderly women are wont to assume towards those who know, as they think, little of life—who are entering upon it with too much hopefulness, and require to have their over prosperity checked by wise reminders of sorrow which must surely come. Sorrow, indeed ! said Madolin to herself, as with bent brows and compressed lips she paced up and down those long corridors through many and many a day—what did Aunt Griselda, whose only disappointment was the misfitting of a dress, or the non-appearance of a suitable husband, know of sorrow compared with her, between whom and the grave stretched nothing but the blackest, most absolute bitterness ?

And then, though Aunt Griselda did talk

so nicely about the inevitable troubles of life, she was always insisting upon dinners and evening parties being given at the Chase; and the new clergyman, with his pretty, frivolous, fashionable little wife, must be made at home there—"because, you know, my dear, they are so very excellent and well-meaning, and Mrs. Norbury will put you into the way of being of use amongst the tenantry." Of use amongst the tenantry, forsooth!—as if that for Madolin could ever mean anything but filling their coal-places at Christmas, and being curtsied to as a Lady Bountiful all the rest of the year in consequence. And Madolin hated that sort of thing, for with all the great surging selfishness of her nature, there was still a foundation of honesty beneath it which would not let her stoop to receive charity-bought obeisances, nor add to the inevitable pretence of all her future life

others which were not of such bitter need.

But Aunt Griselda insisted upon the dinners, whatever became of the coal-giving ; and when her own efforts failed, she moved Sir David to insist upon them too, because Madolin *must* take her place as head of the county society ; the Lauderdale's always had occupied that position, ever since the family was established ; and how could her brother expect that his only child would ever be suitably established in life, unless people of her own rank were gathered round her from whom she might choose one who was worthy of her position and prospects ? It was all very well for the girl to hold up her head and look down upon the county families, and fancy that no one was good enough for her ; but that sort of thing might be carried a little too far, and Madolin was carrying it too far when she shut herself up like a queen in disguise, and refused

to have anything to do with anybody.

Then came misunderstandings, then came quarrels, then came contests between Aunt Griselda's fussy self-importance and Madolin's rock-like calmness; in which contests the calmness always had the best of it, and the end of the matter was that Miss Griselda, finding two ruling spirits could not flourish simultaneously at the Chase, wisely resolved to depart before an open rupture took place. And so, after a few months of restless fidgeting on her part, and quiet resistance on Madolin's, the baronet's sister retired to apartments in town, promising to come down now and then for the purpose of seeing how things went on.

"And now, Madolin dear," she said, as the man was depositing multitudes of parcels in the carriage, previous to her being accompanied by Sir David to the Nunthorpe railway-station—"and now, Madolin, if

there is ever a ball, or concert, or anything of that sort at Matchborough, which you would like to attend, you have nothing to do but send me a line, and I shall be delighted to come down. And if Sir David wants a dinner-party now and then, and you don't feel disposed to have the trouble yourself, nothing will give me so much pleasure as to take the matter off your hands. You know," she added, mysteriously, drawing Madolin a little to one side, "you really must try to make your father's life as pleasant as possible, or there is no telling——"

"Oh! thank you, auntie, don't trouble at all. I will see that papa has everything quite comfortable. I don't believe he cares half so much for society as you think he does."

"Perhaps not, my dear; but when people have a position it must be maintained,

and I am quite sure that any efforts which you may make for your dear papa's domestic comfort and happiness, will meet with an abundant reward. Not of course that you can expect in a quiet place like this the constant variety and amusement which, with one lamentable exception, I think we may say we enjoyed during the whole of our stay at that delightful——"

"Never mind, auntie dear," said Madolin, hastily, stooping to pull out one of the bows in Aunt Griselda's bonnet strings; "I have no doubt we shall manage very nicely together. And pray come down whenever you like—your room in the west corridor will always be kept at liberty for you; and you know papa likes to talk to you about what is going on. Good-bye; we shall miss you ever so much."

And then the upholder of Lauderdale dignity was handed into the carriage. When

she had safely departed, Madolin stretched herself wearily enough in a great arm-chair by the dining-room fire, and clasped her hands behind her head, and watched the flickering lights and shadows play over the portraits of the dead Lauderdale people in their tarnished frames ; and she wondered how long it would be before she, the last of the line, took her place in that silent array, at rest and for ever from all that vexed her now. Might it be soon, for life was likely to be very bitter !

An hour later, Sir David returned from the station, bringing the London paper with him, containing an account of Jetsam's trial.

Madolin roused herself a little. It would not do to provoke either questioning or curiosity about her altered behaviour.

“ Well, it's over at last, my dear,” her father observed, settling himself down in the opposite arm-chair.

"What, Auntie Grisel's visit? I rather thought you liked to have her here, papa."

"Oh! dear no, not that in the least; but the proceedings about this wretched fellow Jetsam. Fifteen years transportation; and richly he deserves it, too."

Madolin turned herself a little round, out of the play of the firelight.

"Indeed, papa. Well, I suppose there was no doubt about his being convicted. He would plead guilty, I should think."

"Oh! the trial was a mere matter of form. Although, if the first indictment of forgery had failed, he would have been arrested on a second charge of embezzlement. It serves him right. I never had less pity for a man. And to think of your having been in the company of such a scoundrel for three weeks! It makes me almost mad to think of it!"

"Never mind, papa, it is not likely to happen again. Transportation for fifteen years! That means being sent to Australia, does it not?"

"Yes—Port Philip, or somewhere thereabouts. I should not wonder, though, with Jetsam's manners and education, if he were to find some sort of private service soon after he is sent out. Government will make better use of a man like that than setting him to make or mend roads."

"But they will not give him his liberty, papa," said Madolin, her thoughts running swiftly over the terrible possibilities involved in Jetsam's superior "manners and education."

"Oh! no, certainly not. He will always be under supervision; and very properly so too. What a wretched thing for his family and friends!"

"Yes, very."

“ But very fortunate that there is no wife for any one to pity.”

“ Not for any one to *pity*,” thought Mado-
lin, as she waved to and fro the feathered
border of a dainty Indian screen—“ not for
any one to pity.”

“ Papa,” she said, after a pause, “suppos-
ing he *had* been married, would they have
let him send for his wife ?”

“ Of course, my dear ; he might send for
her if he chose, but how could he pay her
passage, and keep her when she got out
there ? Possibly, after a few years, when
he began to earn a little money for himself,
he might have sent home for his wife, if he
had one.”

“ And would she have been obliged to go,
papa ?”

“ I really cannot say, my dear. But what
a peculiar question ! As if it could ever be
of the least interest to us !”

"Of course. I only just happened to think how it might be. Did Auntie Grisel start comfortably?"

"Quite. Dr. Evans was in the same carriage, going through to London, so that she has company all the way. I fancy the drive has made me a trifle sleepy. I will have my nap a little earlier than usual, if you will excuse me."

"Oh, certainly, papa. I won't speak one word. But will you let me have the paper, if you are not wishing to read it?"

Sir David rose with due ceremony, and brought the *Standard* to his daughter as she lay carelessly back amongst her cushions. She waited until his heavy breathing showed that he was fast asleep; then, crouching on the hearthrug, read by the firelight the whole account of the trial; how great interest was excited by the gentlemanly appearance of the prisoner; how the judge, in summing

up, dwelt impressively upon the aggravated nature of the crime he had committed, and the subtlety with which, for more than three years, he had eluded justice; how, after an exceedingly short time spent in deliberation, the jury returned a verdict of "guilty;" and, lastly, how the prisoner, who listened with respectful calmness during the pronouncing of the sentence, was removed from the dock, and placed in the charge of a couple of warders, who took him out of court by a small side-door, to avoid the mob waiting outside.

So then another act in the terrible drama was over. Madolin had a feeling of relief now from the tightening grip of suspense. One burning terror had had possession of her since Jetsam's arrest, the terror lest he should be acquitted, and so return to claim from her the love, honour, and obedience—horrible mockery of words—which she had

promised ; return once longed for with a girl's passionate impatience, now dreaded as a living death.

But it was gone. For awhile, at least, the vampire had lifted his wings, and slowly moved away. She had but to suffer, and be silent, and be strong.

Sir David stretched himself. Miss Lauderdale resumed her seat in the easy-chair. There was a little more chat upon indifferent subjects. The dressing-gong sounded. Madolin retired to her room, appearing soon afterwards in the splendours of evening dress. Then came dinner, coffee, another nap, a game at cribbage, and, finally, the assembling of the whole household for family worship, after which there was leave to drop the mask of indifference, and remember, and suffer, and despair.

That day was the pattern of many and many a day that followed it. And when

seven years of this slow torture had passed over the wretched woman's head, Jacob Lund might well say of poor Madolin Lauderdale, as she paced wearily to church by her father's side—

“I can't square her up nohow. Seems like to me she's gotten summut on her mind.”

CHAPTER VII.

“**N**O, please, Miss Lauderdale, do not ask me any more. It would be very pleasant, but I must go, and so there is an end of it.”

“And why *must*?” said Miss Lauderdale. “I see no *must* about it. Now let us proceed to consider this matter carefully, as Mr. Norbury says when he is going to divide his sermon into heads. Here are you wanting a home. Don’t be vexed with me for saying it, Hope, but you must have a home of some sort, there is no mistake at all about that *must*.”

"None at all," said Hope Meredith, gravely, but with just a little ring of proud purpose under the gravity.

"Well, then, here is Nunthorpe Chase, with space enough in it for fifty people, half the rooms unoccupied, the prettiest little chamber that ever you did spy waiting for you in the west corridor, close by Aunt Griselda's own particular sanctum ; though, as you have not seen Aunt Griselda yet, you don't know what a comfort it is to be close to her. Here are papa and myself, wondering what in the world we are to talk to each other about ; and here are you, needing nothing so much as a few months of fresh moorland air to bring the colour back to your cheeks, after that weary spell of nursing down yonder in Nunthorpe Hollow. And yet you talk about going away. It is foolish, Hope, it is indeed. Just look at the matter from a common-sense point of view."

“That is what I have been trying to do for the last three weeks,” said Hope, balancing a crested spoon on the edge of a teacup of the rarest, most delicate china, as she sat at Miss Lauderdale’s feet, “and looking at it has brought me to this terrible *must* which you will not listen to. And then there is another must. I must earn my own living.”

“And how do you propose doing that? By going as companion, I suppose, to some dull, disagreeable, rich woman, like those who advertise in churchy papers, offering fifteen or twenty pounds a year, or perhaps nothing but a ‘comfortable home,’ to the unfortunate young person who is to offer up her life a perpetual burnt-offering to all the advertiser’s whims and fancies? Ah! well, one might have to make even a sadder burnt-offering than that, but I don’t think you are the one to make it.”

“Please go on, Miss Lauderdale, about

the situation ; it does sound so tempting."

"Of course I mean to go on. The woman must be dull, or she would have resources within herself to keep her from being dependent upon a companion ; and she must be disagreeable, or she would not need to advertise for one ; and she must be tolerably rich, or she could not give *you* what would make it worth your while to go to her. I have made out three more *musts*, without any doubt. Ah ! poor little Hope, I can see you toiling away down column after column of the *Times* or *Standard*, or, worse still, a sleepy denominational paper, whilst the old woman dozes in her chair ; or mending her lace for her, which is what I believe a companion is generally expected to do, or counting over piles of blankets that have been lent to dirty women in the parish, or——"

"No, you can't see anything of the kind,"

said Hope, with a quiet, resolute shake of her head. "I mean to go into a hospital, and train for a nurse."

Miss Lauderdale turned and looked down into the face of the young girl who was sitting at her feet. A quiet, middle-class face, nothing but middle-class. No quivering, flashing pride there, pride which comes of noble blood and high descent; none of the sculptured, stately calm which nature's chisel, working on through patient centuries, turns out at last in her favoured Norman children. Nothing but the tender, pure outlines of girlhood, and even these spoiled by six months of watching at the bedside of the old aunt, who, lately dying, had left her niece, Hope Meredith, for legacy, only these three *musts* which were now driving her out into the world, there to shape her way as best she might.

"Hope, you are talking nonsense. Just

get up and look at yourself in the mirror. Put that cup and saucer somewhere first, though. Aunt Grisel will never forgive me if she finds any of her beautiful egg-shell china broken next time she comes ; and then tell me honestly if you think you are fit to go to a hospital and train for anything else than being an invalid all the rest of your days."

"I don't look *very* strong," the girl said, standing on tip-toe to survey herself in the big, old-fashioned glass, "but I think I shall come all right again in two or three months."

"That depends. You certainly will not come all right again unless you take pains to do so. For you to go through a course of hospital training now, simply means disappointment and failure, besides the almost dead certainty of a break-down in your health, after which you know you will be

laid aside, a helpless burden, upon any one who may be good enough to take care of you; and I think I know Hope Meredith well enough to be sure she would not like that sort of thing."

"It is all there, though," said Hope, who, having surveyed the hollow places in her cheeks and neck, had curled herself up again at Miss Lauderdale's feet, and was playing a tune on the fender with the tips of her little boots—"the health, I mean. I don't feel a bit run down, only rather tired. You don't know how much work there is in me yet."

"I am sure I didn't know how much resistance there is, Hope—you with your soft face, and quiet, tender ways, why there is a fifty-horse power of will under it all, whatever may be true about the work. Only you must know you are very different now—I mean in looks—from what you were

when I first saw you, six months ago, at Miss Asgard's house. The thankless old thing, to take so much out of you, and then die and leave you without the means of putting it back again. But once more, Hope, will you let papa and me do what she has left undone? Will you promise to stay with us until you are quite strong, and then you shall do as you like?"

Hope, still gazing steadily into the fire, made no answer for awhile. Then she said slowly, doubtfully,

"But Sir David. What right have I to impose myself upon him?"

"None at all," said Madolin, her slender brows tightening into something like a frown. She was not accustomed to be argued with in this way. She had imagined that a boon such as she proposed conferring upon this friendless girl, would have been accepted at once with a burst of pious gratitude; that

Hope would have fallen on her knees, and with tears in her eyes have blessed the noble benefactress who was extending such privilege to her.

And indeed had Miss Lauderdale been offering her hospitality out of simple kindness, she would most likely at this point have withdrawn it, proudly retiring behind her dignity, and allowing Miss Meredith to lose what she seemed so slow to appreciate. But Madolin could no longer afford to feed her dignity at the expense of her heart. She was hungering and thirsting for something to satisfy the life which for seven long years had been slowly drying up within her ; and in Hope Meredith she began to find what she sought. Hope's companionship was like fresh air to one who has long pined in city streets. Hope's character, firm, yet elastic, lowly, yet springing backward with proud recoil from the least approach to flat-

tery or patronage, was like wholesome bitter to one who has been fed to satiety upon the sweets of fawning dependency. She could not afford to lose the little gleam, though it were only of pale winter sunshine, which had lately struck across her desolate path. She thought she could have commanded it to stay; she found she must ask it as a favour.

“It is not all for your own sake,” she said at last, with an effort, “that I want you not to go away. Hope, you can do me a great deal of good. You have done me a great deal already. It gives me a feeling of life to be with you. There is no one in this stupid country place with whom I can have any companionship. You know—but no, you don’t know,” and Madolin stretched herself wearily in her lounging-chair, “how horrible it is to have everything done for you, to have people obeying you, cringing to

you, talking as if they were afraid of you ; to have no one who dares contradict you, or even suggest that you are in the wrong. It eats all the goodness out of you. You are the only person who, in nearly all my life, has dared to talk freely and fearlessly to me, and you don't know how refreshing it has been."

"I'm sure I ought to have been abundantly refreshed at Miss Asgard's, then," said Hope, with a shrug of her pretty shoulders, "for everything that I did was wrong, instead of right, and she wasn't a bit afraid to tell me so, too."

"Very likely. I shall be just the same when I get old, if nobody speaks the truth to me. And that is why I want you so much to stay. Don't think I am so very unselfish, Hope. I don't believe it is in the nature of any of the Lauderdale people to be that ; but in this matter your interests

and mine agree. It will do you good in body, it will do me good in mind. Stay, Hope, stay."

And Miss Lauderdale drew the girl's head down upon her knee, and kissed her cheek once, twice. It was much for such a woman to do. Poor Madolin! The passionate, starving soul within her was crying out for something, even the merest crumb of honest friendship to stay its hunger; and Hope's very name seemed like a promise of better days, of some faint little dawn of light upon the blackness of darkness through which she must walk to her grave.

CHAPTER VIII.

“**B**UT you have not told me yet whether Sir David will like it,” said the pertinacious middle-class girl, who seemed so very far from anxious to reap the benefits which might be supposed to arise from six months’ residence with such great people as the Lauderdale of Nunthorpe Chase, said residence to be as guest and friend, with nothing menial required.

Madolin did not bend her fine brows any more. She knew the metal she had to deal with now ; knew, too, how much she might win by dealing with it wisely. She looked

away to the other end of the room, where, in a recess almost out of sight, Sir David sat by another fire, reading his paper.

“Papa, will you come here just for one moment, and set Hope’s mind at rest? I have been asking her to stay the summer with us, and she seems to think we have not room for her, or that it will be an infliction upon you. I want you to tell her that it is the very thing, of all others, we should both of us enjoy.”

Sir David laid down his paper, and came with slow, stately step to the corner where the ladies were encamped amongst their tea-cups and tiger-skins. Then, bowing to Hope, he said, somewhat stiffly, perhaps, for, after all, what was she but a stranger and alien amongst them, with no very definite antecedents, so far as they had heard yet?

“I hope Miss Meredith will consider herself quite welcome at the Chase, so long as

she chooses to remain. Anyone in whom my daughter finds agreeable companionship cannot but do a favour to us by remaining as long as possible."

Hope looked up into the old gentleman's face, and shyly expressed her thanks; not by any means, however, in such well-turned sentences as those to which she had just listened. Perhaps she would have felt more relieved if he had done what, under the circumstances, her own good-hearted father—dead years and years ago—would have done to a friendless girl who was coming to stay under his roof, patted her on the head, or, better still, kissed her cheek, and said cheerily,

"Bless you, my dear, don't be afraid! We are plain people, but very glad to see you; so just make up your mind to stop as long as ever you feel comfortable."

But who ever heard of a Lauderdale speak-

ing in that way? And Madolin evidently thought that everything was quite right now, for she said, pleasantly enough,

“There now, Hope, I told you how it would be. You see you need not have made such a circumstance of staying. We will drive to the Hollow this very afternoon, and bring your things from the old house, and you shall settle down with us for the summer. It will not be so very dull either, for Aunt Griselda is to come by-and-by, and then there will be dinners, and dances, and all that sort of thing, and you can go instead of me, which will be an immense relief. And then, too, Uncle Mac is to be here from Canada some time before long. Did you not say, papa, he was coming home on business this summer?”

“I did, my dear. Some of our people said so last time I was in town. I believe he has a furlough of some months.”

“Is Mr. Mac in the army?” asked Hope, timidly, having a somewhat uncomfortable prevision of a second edition of Sir David Lauderdale, tall, erect, military, stiff, given to speaking in long sentences, and with most overpowering politeness.

Madolin laughed.

“He used to be in the army, but he is not Mr. Mac. His proper name is Maud Arbuthnot Cayley, but as the first sounds womanish, and the second clumsy, and the third commonplace, we call him by the first letters of all of them. He sold out of the army awhile ago, but, of course everybody calls him Captain still; though I believe he has a farm or something of that sort out in Canada.”

Hope did not look much relieved. Perhaps Miss Lauderdale noticed it, for she continued in an assuring tone :

“He is delightful—everyone says he is

delightful. He does not properly belong to us at all ; we only call him uncle because he has such a lot of nephews and nieces all over the world. I think he is quite a young man, and I fancy he belongs to us in some far-off way—does he not, papa.”

“My aunt Janet, sister of Sir Jasper Lauderdale, married into the Cayley family,” said Sir David, going back to his paper at the other end of the room.

“Oh, well, then, of course we have a sort of claim upon him. I don’t remember him at all, myself, for he was here only once, a long time ago, when I was quite a little girl. He was about the same age as myself, only, of course, much bigger and stronger ; and he used to toss me in a blanket, with the old Rector’s little girls to help. Oh, dear ! I wish the time never came when we had to give over being tossed in blankets. And I think, too, Mac was the only

person I never flew into a passion with."

"You in a passion, Miss Lauderdale!" and Hope looked up into the pale, self-contained face, so quiet in its pride, yet with streaks of fiery intensity quivering through it sometimes, like the half-hidden red glow at the heart of an opal gem. "Were you ever really in a passion?"

"Oh, yes,—very often; with Auntie Grisel most of all, because she was so provoking, and that was the only way I could get what I wanted. But I was talking about Uncle Mac, not about myself, and how nice he used to be when he was a boy. All the dogs were so fond of him he could do whatever he liked with them. He must be rather rough now, though, I should think. It is a queer place, far up in the country, where he has been living for the last few years. I don't believe they have either carpets or tablecloths; and as for

dressing for dinner, it would be simply ridiculous. Fancy black broadcloth and a white tie in a log hut, with a red Indian to wait upon you! I can't imagine how a man can keep himself quite a gentleman when he is always amongst that sort of thing."

"Can't you?" said Hope, simply. "I shouldn't have thought that sort of thing would have made any difference, so long as the real sort of thing was in him."

"Well, we shall see. It will not make any difference to me, at any rate. I mean that I don't feel enough interest in him to care whether he is a gentleman or not. I believe you will get on with him, though, because he never quarrels with anyone; and I am very glad he is coming, because it will make it pleasanter for you. You will not be moped to death, after all, at this stupid Nunthorpe Chase.

Hope nestled a little closer to her new friend.

"I don't think I should be moped anywhere, so long as I had you to talk to. I love you very much—you have been so good to me."

A soft light, very rarely seen there, came into Miss Lauderdale's eyes. That was what she longed for, to have love given, and her kindness acknowledged. There was life yet, throbbing warm and strong far down in her heart; a woman's yearning for friendship, companionship, ay, and love too, though that longing, when it stirred at all, could only stir now to bitter pain.

"You are a dear child, Hope!" she said. "You have done me all the good in the world. Ah, me! I wish in all my life I had done half as much for anybody as you have done for me—but I never have. Nobody is any better for my living. Papa

is the only person I could once have helped at all, but even he can do without me now. I used to be so impatient of doing anything for him that at last he gave over asking me ; and now everybody tries to please me, and I try to please nobody. A sweet life, isn't it?"

"But that cannot be," said Hope. "It is impossible to live with one's father without being either a comfort to him, or something else."

"Well, then, Hope, if that is the case, I am the something else. But really it is not so here. I never quarrel with papa. I never vex him at all. I sit at the head of his table, and dress nicely, and that is all he requires of me. He never expects me to make any sacrifice for him, even in the least little thing. I sometimes wish he would, just for a change. No, you need not look alarmed, Hope, he is fast asleep, he will not

hear us. He always has a sleep like this after afternoon tea, and another after dinner. Brilliant for me, of course; but then what else do I deserve? What was I saying to you when you disturbed me by looking so sharply round? Oh! about making sacrifices. Yes, I do think it would be a good thing if I had to do it sometimes, if everything in this house were not arranged for my sole comfort and convenience. It is humiliating. People talk about the submission of others making you proud. It doesn't; it makes you terribly ashamed of yourself."

"Miss Lauderdale!"

"Well."

"Will you let me say just one thing to you?"

"Yes; say as many things as you like, and make them as bitter as ever you can. I want to be contradicted. I want somebody to thrust hard at me, not with paltry little

pettinesses and conventionalities, like Aunt Griselda, but with truths that I know to be true, and that will make me believe them, whether I wish to do so or not. Oh! for a huge allopathic dose of moral quinine! Hope, give me it! You are the only person in all the world who has ever been brave enough to speak out to me, and that is the very reason why I love you so much. There must be some good in me, just a little, must there not, Hope, for me to like people to tell me the truth? If I were quite bad, I would not listen to it at all."

"I don't know; but what I want to say to you is this. The other day, when we were sitting just like this, Sir David came in, and I saw at once he wanted to join us, and have a general talk about things."

"Perhaps. When, for a wonder, anybody pleasant is staying in the house, he would like often enough to join us, and

have a general talk about things. But I was talking to you just then about my life here, and what I could do with it, and that was a great deal more important, infinitely more important, than that we should make room for papa, and drop into a general conversation."

"No, it was not. Because, just then, dropping into what you call a general conversation would have been, for you, an act of self-denial; and that one should be able to deny oneself when need comes, lies at the foundation of all the use of life that I have any faith in; and so, instead of talking about your duty, you would have done it, which is far better."

"Hope, what a logician you are! The Chief Justice himself couldn't have packed up an argument more neatly."

"Well, but I haven't done yet. Of course we could not very well go on talking then,

and so you took to your illuminating as earnestly as if there had been nothing else in the world to think about, and I could see Sir David was disappointed. By-and-by he said something about having the clergyman and his wife asked to dinner."

"Yes; which is simply intolerable. Fancy one, two, three hours of the dreariest common-places, with a woman who has no earthly ideas beyond managing her house and keeping her children nice."

"Two very useful ideas, I should think; and any woman who can reduce them to practice is not utterly commonplace. But Mr. Norbury can talk well enough, and Sir David likes to have arguments with him about politics and the best way of improving the condition of the working-classes, and so on."

"Yes, and so on; and meanwhile I am to hear what a delightful pattern Mrs. Nor-

bury has found for a baby's bib, or how comfortably Percy Julius has cut one of his double teeth; or I am to be told how well Mrs. Norbury's sister plays at croquet. It is too much, Hope—it really is. Give me a pinafore and a coral at once, and then I shall know what I am.”

“You might know, if you wished, just as well without the pinafore and the coral. You are Sir David's only child, and you ought to do all you can to make him happy. And if now and then he likes to have a talk about politics and workmen's cottages at his own table, you ought to be willing to let him have it.”

“Hope, you are too practical. I mean you give the quinine in too large doses. But if it will please you, next time papa wants the Norburys to come, I will not throw any obstacles in the way.”

“I don't think he will want them again

very soon—at least, he will not ask you about having them. He looked grieved when you shut him up so abruptly; and it takes a great deal to make a proud man like Sir David show that anything hurts him.”

“You have wonderfully sharp eyes, Hope. You look so quaint and quiet, with those funny, unworldly little ways of yours; and yet I do believe you see everything. I don’t know how it is, but really papa, when he does want me to do anything, always hits upon the very thing I would most avoid; and so does everyone else.”

“In that case, then,” said Hope, laughing, “I should think you have plenty of opportunities of self-denial. You need not ask to have them pointed out to you.”

Madolin drew herself up. Even Hope must not go too far. Sir David’s daughter was something like those fashionable lady

patients who send for a physician that they may describe their own ailments, and prescribe their own remedies. She felt half inclined to drop the conversation ; and yet there was a strange charm in it—the luxury of confession without the mortification of penance.

“Don’t talk about such little things,” she said at last, with a touch of impatience. “Tell me about something that I can do. I told you I wanted to be of some use in the world.”

“Did you ? I had forgotten. Well, then, I know something that you can do, and it won’t give you a great deal of trouble either.”

“Perhaps it costs money ; and you know papa does not give me a large allowance.”

“No. I don’t think it would cost any money at all ; and it would be a real kind-

ness. You know Theresa Lund—Tossie they always call her—the daughter of the lodgekeeper?”

Madolin looked doubtful.

“A pretty girl—you must have seen her sometimes when you have gone out into the village.”

“Hope, I never do go out into the village, except to church. I hate having the children drop curtseys to me. I do seem to remember a girl, though, somewhere about the Lodge, with a sort of Irish face, blue eyes, black curling hair, and rosy cheeks. I suppose that is the one you mean. But I know very little about the people papa employs. I cannot go into poor women’s cottages and chatter to them and ask about their babies. And so that pretty girl is Jacob Lund’s daughter?”

“Yes, and I don’t fancy she is in a very good state of mind just now. She has

notions of getting up in the world, going into a shop, or something of that kind, where she can dress as she likes, and be able to go out after dark. Poor Tossie! the height of her ambition appears to be, just at present, to go out after dark, because her mother will not allow it. Mrs. Lund was talking to me about her the other day, and saying how she wished she could get her into service at the Chase; and I thought, if you would let her come as sewing-maid under Catton, it would be a real kindness to her."

"And should I have to take her under my wing, talk judiciously to her, attend to the formation of her character, and that sort of thing? Because—really, Hope, you know, that is not in my line at all."

"I don't think you have much of a wing to take her under yet," said Hope, saucily. It was astonishing what sharp, trenchant

things that shy, demure little maiden could say sometimes. "At least, as regards that sort of thing. All that I want you to do, is to give her a situation under Catton, and sometimes, when she comes in your way, to speak a kind word to her. A little approbation goes a long way with Tossie. She will do anything, so long as she is praised for it; but she never gets a bit of praise at home. Her mother is always fussing and fuming about the house, and finding fault with poor Tossie for spending so much time over doing her hair, or trimming hats and making bows. Now that is just the thing she has a talent for, and I am sure Catton would soon make a first-rate maid of her."

"Well, she may come as soon as ever you like. Catton told me the other day the sewing was almost too much for her sometimes. And will that count for doing good?"

Hope could not help laughing.

"I should think it will. A very little attention from you will soon make her feel proud of her place ; and at any rate, if she lives here, she will be prevented from forming bad companionships."

"That will be something," said Madolin, clenching her small white teeth.

"Yes. Mrs. Lund is getting rather anxious about her. Tossie has those pretty, attractive ways which make people fond of her, and she has not prudence enough to teach her where she should stop. Also, she is a little bit wilful and fond of her own way."

"God help her, then ! Hope, she shall come at once. There is the gong. I will speak to Catton as soon as she comes to my dressing-room, and you may tell Mrs. Lund, next time you go out, that we are willing to receive her."

And Madolin, with a sudden fierce impatience, which Hope could not understand, swept her lace-work away into a little Indian basket, and went to dress for dinner.

CHAPTER IX.

HOPE MEREDITH, between whom and Miss Lauderdale this conversation had taken place, was the only child of a medical man in Matchborough. He had died when she was twelve years old, leaving a widow quite unprovided for, save by the small insurance which he had effected on his life.

Mrs. Meredith was a self-helpful, self-reliant woman. After her husband's death, she removed from their large, comfortable house in the High Street to a cottage in the outskirts of the town, and supplemented her income by taking boarders for the Match-

borough grammar-school. She found time to teach her own daughter, too, such small store of accomplishments as she herself possessed, and by dint of almost painful economy, gathered together enough money to send the girl to Heidelberg, as pupil teacher in a school there for a year, when she had learned all that could be learned at home.

Better still, she taught her those habits of womanly resolve and self-denial which had been her own stronghold in need. She knew that Hope must, sooner or later, earn her living in the world. In that upper middle-class to which professional men usually belong, girls without fortune, and lacking the stylish, fashionable manners which sometimes serve instead of it, have small chance of marriage. And Mrs. Meredith had higher aims for her simple-minded daughter than that she should fall into the arms of the first man who proposed to her,

or starve on at home in enforced idleness, for fear of damaging her chances of a settlement in life by honest self-help.

She watched carefully the growth and development of the girl's character, looking for indications of any special capacity which, wisely fostered, might reach to such excellence as would insure its possessor worth and success in life. But, for a while, the good mother seemed destined to disappointment. Hope Meredith was one of those apparently ordinary girls who have no strong bent in any direction. She had a keen eye for form, colour, and beauty, but this was not accompanied by more than the most moderate skill in the use of pencil and brush. She understood music well, and her face lighted up almost into beauty at the performance of a good sonata or concerto, but she could not, to have saved her life, have played one of those flashy drawing-

room pieces by which only a modern young lady can be admitted to honourable place in the ranks of amateur performers. She could sing Scotch songs and English ballads sweetly enough by herself, but her voice quavered like an exhausted teetotum if any one but her mother listened. She knew a little of French and German, and was well-grounded in the "usual branches of a sound English education;" but then every nursery governess at twenty pounds a year is expected, now-a-days, to be able to say that of herself. She was very useful in the house, delighted in dusting and cooking, never got into anybody's way, or asserted her own rights in opposition to those of other people; but these qualities, though making her valuable as a daughter at home, were of little market profit in the great world of society.

At eighteen, then, there seemed no prospect for Hope Meredith but nursery teach-

ing, or paid companionship to Miss Lauderdale's typical old woman, rich, dull, and disagreeable. No mountain-peaks of genius in her character to attract the fertilising showers of popularity; no strong, overmastering force of will to seize and keep for herself a place in the world; nothing in looks, manners, or achievement to give society assurance of an unwonted treasure.

And yet, if anyone was out of sorts, Hope always seemed to know what was the right thing to be done. If sickness visited the neighbours it was Hope who sat up at night with the invalid, or in the day-time prepared dainty dishes—divining, as if by magic, what was wanted, and when it would be most welcome.

If one of the half dozen boarders, merry, mischief-loving little lads, cut his finger, sprained his wrist, got chilblains, ran up against a post, or upset a kettle of water

upon his toes, Hope was there directly with the proper remedies, applying them neatly, skilfully, with a firm hand that never flinched, and a gentle tenderness that was in itself almost like a cure.

Slowly, then, the problem worked itself towards a solution. The care of the sick and suffering was evidently Hope's call in life; a noble call too—perhaps the best any woman can have who has not yet listened to or obeyed the supreme mandate of love.

Mrs. Meredith determined that she should have all possible opportunity of becoming a proficient. She spoke to one of her friends, a medical man in the town, who introduced Hope to the Lady Superintendent of the Hospital. No systematic training was to be obtained there at present, but much insight and experience might be gained; and Hope was such a ready scholar that she soon became very valuable amongst the patients.

The doctor advised her remaining there a year or two at a nominal salary, after which she could go to one of the London hospitals for regular training, and become, in her own turn, Lady Superintendent somewhere else.

But before that time came, Hope's nursing capabilities were called for nearer home. Mrs. Meredith's own health failed. The brave little woman had struggled nobly in the long years of her widowhood ; worked hard, lived sparingly, risen early, sat up late, given herself but scant rest or holiday, and now these things began to tell upon her. The busy hands were found to drop, one by one, the duties which had been so cheerfully done. She could but sit in her arm-chair and toil on at the sewing work of the house. Then that, too, became more than she could manage ; she must needs be content to plan , and direct, whilst others laboured. Then

even the diligent brain failed, and she was obliged to take for herself the help she would so much rather have given.

Hope did what she could towards managing the little family of boarders; but as her mother required from day to day more constant care, she was obliged to let them go, and with them almost the whole support of the house. Still there was a little money left on hand. No debts had accumulated. The friends of the children promised they should return as soon as they could be received again. With rigid economy Hope managed to make ends meet, and even lay by a little for the time when extra comforts should be needed. That time came only too soon. As the summer days began to shorten, Mrs. Meredith died, leaving Hope alone in the world.

Providence came to her assistance, at least everybody thought it did, in the shape

of an old lady, Miss Asgard of Nunthorpe Hollows, an ancient spinster with a large fortune and a taste for illuminated manuscripts. The Meredith family was distantly connected with her own, but she had carefully avoided anything like intimacy since the doctor's death, having a wholesome, and, under the circumstances, perfectly justifiable dread of poor relations. What *did* people marry for, she should like to know, and then die and leave widows and children to be taken care of by those who had never achieved the honour or happiness of the matrimonial estate? Let the dead bury their dead, Miss Asgard used to say, when benevolent ladies pestered her with cases of distress, or drew eloquent pictures of weeping widows and starving orphans, between whom and the bitter east winds of poverty her own wealth might place a grateful screen.

However, hearing of Hope's lonely condi-

tion, and being herself in that state of health which might soon render the companionship of a cheerful, unselfish, well-educated young girl very acceptable, she magnanimously offered the "poor thing" an asylum at Nunthorpe Hollows, until such time as she could look about for other means of support. Hope's friends advised her to go. She needed rest and change after the long strain, both of mind and body, which she had borne since her mother's illness. She could not begin her work of hospital training at once. Miss Asgard's offer seemed the very thing she needed, giving her what she supposed to be a comfortable home, whilst the services she could render would relieve her from any feeling of dependency.

So there was a sale at poor Mrs. Meredith's cottage. A chest which had been part of her mother's outfit, contained all the worldly goods, in the shape of plate, linen, books,

and some mementoes, which Hope reserved to herself; and leaving this in charge of a friend at Matchborough, she entered upon her new life at the Hollows.

Now it so chanced that Miss Lauderdale, who, when not restlessly pacing up and down the elm-tree avenue, or leaning back among her silken cushions, was generally copying, in fine church text, extracts from the English poets, and illuminating illustrations for them from the old missals in her father's library, had heard of Miss Asgard's collection of ancient manuscripts, and had asked the clergyman's wife to call with her upon the old lady, for the purpose of examining them. They happened to call a week or two after Hope had taken up her abode at the Hollows. Miss Asgard, who had lost no time in making her young relative useful in that station of life in which it had pleased Providence to place her, de-

puted her to attend Miss Lauderdale to the library, take down any cases which she might require, dust, unlock, open, and then replace them, when the interest of the great lady should be satisfied.

If Hope had been as silly as most girls, she would have done her duties of custodian with the airs of an injured queen, mute, uninterested, indignant at the work thrust upon her, and going through it with an air of disgust so manifest as to spoil any pleasure which the most fervent lover of antique manuscripts might have found in disagreeable old Miss Asgard's collection. But Hope was not silly, and whatever pride she might have was judiciously balanced by common sense. Besides, she had a real interest in these things herself. She could illuminate very prettily. She had an artist's feeling for colour. A bramble-leaf, with autumn's burning kiss upon it, was as dear a delight

to her as his glass of old port to a connoisseur, or his shred of mouse china to a virtuoso. That lightness of hand, firmness of touch, quickness of eye, which made her so useful in a hospital dressing-room, served her now, with patient care, to copy the quaint conceits of the old monks; and she was not wanting either in that other, inner sense, that perception of spiritual life and meaning, which made her quick to discern the symbolism hidden under leaf, and bud, and flower, which they had wrought.

Something in her frank, eager, intelligent manner soon attracted Madolin's attention. Here was no ordinary girl, drudging on in the dull groove of mediocrity. Receiving Hope's services at first with her usual calm, lofty indifference, she was startled by a chance word here and there, a keen remark, a subtle explanation of some strange device, discovering her own ignorance of art, as

compared with this young girl's keen appreciation of it. Where she touched it mechanically, Hope saw through to the deep undermeaning. What was only body for her, was body and soul for Hope, a living, breathing, moving interest, which gave zest to her enjoyment, and fire and vigour to her work. And then she had such a simple, independent way of saying what she thought. Madolin, wearied to death with flattery, bored with the obsequious attentions of people anxious for the honour of her friendship, experienced a delightful sensation of freshness at the way in which Hope set her right, contradicted her, insisted upon her own opinions; diving now and then into the garden to fetch an ivy-leaf or rose-spray, to show exactly how the tracery of some initial letter ought to be arranged, or climbing like a squirrel up the library steps to hoist down some dusty old book, in which she might find a specimen of the exact

colour which must be used for the border of a saint's robe, to make it in accordance with church canons on the subject. The girl was as good as a chapter of clergymen, and as fearless as a regiment of dragoons.

"Shall I see you again next time I come to the Hollows?" asked Miss Lauderdale; asked, too, with an interest strangely different from the careless condescension which, an hour before, had been quite sufficient for Miss Asgard's companion.

"Most likely," said Hope. "I believe I shall be here through the winter."

"I am glad of that. And shall we have another talk about the illuminations? And will you let me see some of yours?"

"Oh, yes, if you like. And I will show you what I use to raise the letters. You can make your designs look so much prettier if you raise the initial letters; and I will look for that etching—I am sure I have it here—which some one copied for me from a

manuscript in the British Museum. It would interest you so much, if you like that sort of thing."

"Thank you—you are very kind. I am quite sure I should learn a great deal from you. And——"

Miss Lauderdale hesitated. But still, yes, she might as well. It need involve nothing further. It was not as if Miss Meredith was going to live in the neighbourhood, and would therefore look upon the kindness as an opening for familiarity.

"And would you care to come over to the Chase some day? I will show you a few of my etchings. Perhaps, too, you will like to see some of papa's old books—he has some very good ones, with illuminations in them, which I am sure he would be delighted to allow you to copy. You will find me at home almost always, I scarcely ever go out."

CHAPTER X.

HAD Miss Meredith, then, the provincial doctor's portionless child, no appreciation of the honour conferred upon her by an invitation to Nunthorpe Chase, that she answered so very calmly,

"Thank you. If it is not very far, I shall be glad to walk over some day. I have not much time of my own now, though, for Miss Asgard has so many things for me to do."

And then Hope busied herself in returning the old manuscripts to their cases, instead of obsequiously attending Miss Lauder-

dale round the room on a tour of inspection. Anyone else would have been overpowered, would have paused, at any rate, to find words for her gratitude. Hope did not seem to have any difficulty in expressing herself.

Curious, and yet rather piquant, thought Miss Lauderdale, as, gathering the reins in her hand, and bowing a courteous adieu to Miss Asgard, who, overwhelmed with the honour of a visit from the lady of Nunthorpe Chase, had actually trotted to the front door, to keep aristocracy in view as long as possible, she returned home to the weariness and loneliness and bitterness of the life appointed to her there. And a great longing arose within her to know more of this girl, who cared so little to be known or noticed ; who, humble, friendless, dependent, could yet afford to treat with *debonnaire* indifference the advances of even county

people. It was a new interest in the monotonous dead level of her experience.

For seven years now Madolin Lauderdale had borne that sad secret of hers. It had made her old before her time, reserved, stern, and cold. She walked upon a volcano which might at any moment burst open at her feet. Chance remarks from Aunt Griselda or Sir David, neither of whom could forget "that wretched affair" at Heidelberg, flashed from time to time upon the terrible past, and brought it all so vividly before her. In seven years more Jetsam would be coming back again. Would God let her die first? It was the only thing she ever asked of Him.

Wearily, wearily the days went on, and there was no interest for her in life. One by one the companions who had known her in her bright, impetuous girlhood married, and forgot her. One by one the suitors

who would fain have borne her away to be queen-regnant in a fair home of her own, departed, sad at heart, but not so sad as she whom they left behind. Love, the hope of which, or its memory, or its possession, is the one true fulfilment of a woman's life, was for ever set apart from her. The warm, passionate heart within her could only beat to feel its own misery. And none must know, none must comfort her.

Why did not Miss Lauderdale marry? Why did not Miss Lauderdale go into society? Why did not Miss Lauderdale visit amongst the poor? Why did not Miss Lauderdale join a sisterhood, if the world had lost its charms for her? said one or another of the Chase set, watching the cloud of despair deepening year by year upon her face. What could anyone want more than had been given to her? She had beauty, money, a splendid home, a kind old father who wait-

ed upon her as proudly as though she had been his young wife, instead of his careless, indifferent daughter. And yet she took it all with such graceless discontent. But the Lauderdale family were a proud family, and that Spanish woman had mingled her bitterness and passion, as well as her beauty, with their pride; and poor Madolin had to take her portion, the evil with the good.

Hope, too, had rather a distressful time of it with rich old Miss Asgard. The promised visit was paid to Nunthorpe Chase, sharpening Madolin's interest and quickening her desire to have the girl for a friend; but Miss Asgard had not asked Hope to the Hollows to have her go dancing about to great people's houses. She must make herself useful, in return for the board and lodging which were so generously provided for her. It was not everyone who would have taken in a friendless girl, and she ought to feel that she

could never do enough to repay the benefit. She liked books, did she? Well, there was a catalogue to be made of all those in the library, and numbers written and cut out and pasted over the proper place of each one. What pleasanter employment than that, for anyone who had a taste for literature? She was fond of gardening. All the seeds of the choice annuals wanted collecting and spreading out to dry, and then sifting and wrapping up in brown paper, and labelling and stringing in rows across the roof of the spare attic. Such an occupation as that must satisfy even the intensest lover of horticulture. Hope was benevolently inclined. There were hundreds of yards of flannel to be measured off, and petticoats to be made, and tracts to be covered with brown paper, and ticketed and endorsed with the caution—"Keep this book clean." There were clothing-club cards to be written out and

added up at the close of the year, and a separate little interest sum to be worked in connection with each, to ascertain how many pence or half-pence each poor person ought to receive upon her investments. Miss Meredith loved housewifery. There was threadbare old linen to mend, according to the excellent maxim, never departed from at the Hollows—"Take two threads, and miss two;" and stockings, Miss Asgard's fine Lisle thread stockings, to darn so that the weak place could not be detected, even with spectacles; and pillow lace to repair, fibre by fibre, for it had been in the family so many years, and was so very good of its kind, that Miss Asgard could not think of treating it with less than *that* respect. Miss Meredith liked to know what was going on in the world. There were the columns of the *Times* and the *Standard* and the *Guardian* to be gone through, and what so pleasant

for her as to read them aloud, Miss Asgard nodding in her chair the while, but always, as surely as the reading ceased, waking up and vigorously asserting that she had not slept a wink. Really, when one came to think about it, Hope ought to have been the happiest girl in the world, to have all her wants, as one might say, anticipated and provided for by an ingenuity which seemed almost fairy-like.

At last the ingenious old fairy died, not much regretted by anyone—scarcely even bewailed by Dr. Clay, the excellent Nunthorpe physician, who had visited her regularly once a week for the last ten years. She died very suddenly, and in her will, which was made after Hope came to stay with her, she left that young person an ancient family tea-pot, as an acknowledgment of the services rendered by her; also the sum of five pounds for mourning.

Upon hearing of the death, Miss Lauderdale drove over to the Hollows, and insisted upon bringing Hope back with her until affairs were settled.

She found the girl's companionship so pleasant, the breeze of new life which she brought into that dreary house so refreshing, that the few days offered at first extended to as many weeks, and, finally, as we have seen, arrangements were made for Hope's visit to be indefinitely lengthened out.

Shortly after the quinine conversation recorded in the previous chapter, Jacob Lund's daughter was received at the Chase as sewing-maid and general assistant to Catton; and Madolin, for the first time in all her life, felt that she had done some good in the world.

And what a window even that little act of kindness opened towards the sweet blue

heavens, only those could know whose lives had been, like hers, one long exile from all that is tender and true.

CHAPTER XII.

“**A**ND pray, may I ask to be informed of the antecedents of this young person who appears to have established herself so familiarly in the bosom of the family? I am not aware that the name has ever been mentioned in my hearing during any of my previous visits to Nunthorpe Chase.”

It was Aunt Griselda who made this rather ominous speech; and the “young person” referred to was not, as might have been supposed, Catton’s lately-appointed assistant, but Hope Meredith, whose adoption into the Chase family was a severe

blow to excellent Miss Lauderdale's ideas of propriety.

Seven years, carrying her just across to the shady side of the three score and ten appointed as the ordinary portion of human life, had somewhat diminished Aunt Griselda's natural vigour, and stiffened her joints, and parched her never-very-blooming features, and bent her once erect figure, and given her a slight resemblance to a valuable piece of old bronze. But she was a fine woman, nevertheless; only a little bit garrulous, and perhaps a trifle more self-opinionated and given to issue perpetual cannonades of judicious maxims. And then, in addition to the staunch Toryism which had grown with her growth and strengthened with her strength, Aunt Griselda had had, ever since that wretched affair at Heidelberg, an aversion amounting almost to horror for middle-class people whose connections

had not been thoroughly ascertained. Of course it was the most natural thing in the world she should have such a horror, and nobody, least of all Sir David and her niece, ever found fault with her for having it. Only the niece, at any rate, would have preferred that Aunt Grisel's terrible experience at Heidelberg should not have been brought so constantly forward.

"You know, my dear," the old lady would say at every convenient opportunity, "it would be impossible to make you understand my feelings about that sort of people. That execrable——"

And then Miss Lauderdale would waive the subject.

"Never mind, auntie dear ; we won't say any more about it. It is really no use agitating yourself so constantly. You will have Heidelberg on the brain, if you don't mind."

Perhaps that was one reason why Madolin did not care to have Miss Griselda living always at the Chase.

And now here was one of the obnoxious class actually received as a member of the Lauderdale family, sauntering familiarly with Madolin up and down the elm avenue, closeted with her for hours in the library amongst those valuable old manuscripts, any one of which was worth a round fifty guineas—she hoped her brother had a catalogue of them all; if not, she would give him no rest until one was made—sitting with perfect familiarity at Madolin's feet in the cozy leisure of afternoon tea-time; nay, actually receiving the Lauderdale kiss night after night, and from proud Madolin, too, who had never been known to bestow a caress upon anyone but her own father and aunt. Well might Miss Griselda ask, with the air of an injured person, after the

antecedents and introductions of the new-comer.

Madolin looked her aunt steadily in the face. She was prepared to fight, if need were, for her possession in Hope's friendship, the only possession now which made life endurable to her.

"The young person, aunt, about whom you inquire, is Miss Meredith, the daughter of a medical man at Matchborough, who died many years ago. She has kindly promised to stay with me through the summer."

"Very kind indeed of her," said Aunt Griselda, with a fling of one of her long strips of knitting. "I have no doubt you might find many people equally kind if you gave yourself the trouble to look for them. Sir David told me she was an orphan, or something of that nature. May I ask, have you been long acquainted with her?—sufficiently long, I mean, to justify you in ad-

mitting her to such familiarity as she appears to enjoy at present?"

"I have known her for more than six months. I met her at Miss Asgard's house. She went there after her mother's death. The Asgards are distant connections of the Merediths."

"Very distant, I should say. I never heard that Miss Asgard had indigent relatives of that name. Of course you are quite sure that the statement may be relied upon. Miss Asgard, I suppose, treated her with deference, being a connection, and left her no doubt a handsome legacy, besides the family tea-pot, which most likely was a tribute of esteem and affection."

"You seem to have given yourself a great deal of trouble, Auntie Grisel, to find out Hope's exact position at The Hollows. But will you be kind enough to remember that she is *my* guest now."

“I beg pardon, my dear,” said Miss Griselda, not wishing to provoke a quarrel which might shorten her own visit at the Chase. “I do not in the least wish to hint at anything detrimental to the young lady. Only, when I was a girl, it was considered wise to be very careful in the choice of companions. That is all I have to say. Unless indeed I might add that at this particular juncture, when Captain Cayley may be expected to make his appearance at any time, and stay perhaps for weeks in the house—”

“Oh! auntie dear, don’t distress yourself!” and a delicate flash of satire played over Miss Lauderdale’s face. “I daresay Miss Meredith will excuse poor Uncle Mac’s little roughnesses. She is not critical, and you know he is really a very good fellow, by all accounts. I have already told her that she must make allowance for him.”

Aunt Griselda dropped her knitting.

What could Madolin be thinking about? She was so little accustomed to irony, and from her reserved, indifferent niece, too, that she could not comprehend the situation.

“My dear, are you aware what you are saying? A girl like Miss Meredith make allowances for anyone connected by ties, however remote, to the Lauderdale family! You must surely be joking.”

“Just the very thing that I am doing, auntie dear, so do not trouble yourself any more about it. Seriously, I have not the least doubt that Hope and Uncle Mac will get on very well together, if he should happen to come whilst she is here. Papa says he is a dear, good-hearted, honest old fellow.”

“Not so very old, Madolin, if you please,” said Aunt Griselda, drawing herself up with dignity; “and when I was a girl, young

ladies were not accustomed to call their male relatives old fellows. I presume you have already taken some lessons from your new friend in the art of elegant conversation."

"Come, come, auntie, no more of that. Hope Meredith is my friend, and my friend she shall remain, whatever you or anyone else may say to the contrary. So we will let that matter drop. As for Mac, I don't remember him in the least, except that I am told he used to help to toss me in a blanket, when he was over here, twenty years ago. I don't suppose I shall particularly care to have him again, except as he may serve to make Hope's visit a little brighter."

"Perhaps too bright, my dear. Of course Captain Cayley, being a man of good position, would never think of committing himself to anything of the kind; but for Miss Meredith it would be a most brilliant op-

portunity, and I should not wonder if the girl——”

“Aunt Griselda, we will not speak any more about Hope Meredith. I tell you, once for all, she is my guest.”

“So you have told me before, my dear. You really seem to be quite touchy about her. But I always did say, Madolin, and truth compels me to say it again now, that you were never sufficiently cautious in the choice of your friends. Ever since that wretched experience at Heidelberg, I have had such an intense horror of——”

“Excuse me, auntie, I think I heard papa calling.”

And Madolin went hastily out of the room.

Miss Griselda chafed and fumed for a moment or two, then resumed her knitting. Her niece could not bear to be reminded of Heidelberg—that was what had made her

go out of the room in such a hurry. And no wonder, for it must be a source of lasting humiliation to her that she had allowed herself to accept the attentions of a man who was worse than a disgrace to society. But perhaps it was just as well that she had made such a mistake. Though it did not seem to have humbled her very much, still it might be used advantageously as a check when she was launching out rather too independently in the choosing and defending of her friends. And Miss Griselda meant to avail herself of it pretty often.

Sir David came in, and his excellent sister resumed the thread of her discourse.

“Such a pity, my dear brother, as I was saying just now, that Madolin does not exercise a little more discretion in the choice of her friends. To my own personal knowledge there are at least half-a-dozen families within a drive of the Chase who

would be delighted to be on intimate terms with her, and have her at their town houses during the season, and do anything in the world to amuse and interest her, and yet she must needs pass over them all to make an associate of this doctor's daughter—a girl with absolutely no tone about her, indeed, I think I may almost say quite the reverse, Miss Meredith's manner being singularly wanting in the polish and reserve which are usually supposed to characterize people of position."

"But a sensible girl, Griselda, a very sensible girl," said Sir David, "and perfectly obliging."

"Oh, yes! I have not the slightest doubt of *that*. And most likely quite awake to her own interests. I should wonder what girl, admitted to familiar association in a house like this, would not, at any rate, make an effort to be obliging. Can you really

say, now, David, dear, that you approve of her being here?"

Sir David, who was a man of strict integrity, was compelled to say that he *did* approve of it. Moreover, he went on to own that life at Nunthorpe Chase had been quite a different thing since Hope Meredith came to the house, and that he did not know what they should do without her.

Miss Griselda looked disgusted.

"An exceedingly pleasant person in her way, my dear brother, and with her own ends to serve, you may depend upon it. What I complain of is this, that my niece has neglected so many superior people, to fix her affections upon this upstart—for really I can call her by no other name. For instance, now, those delightful Regisons—you remember them, don't you? I used to write to you from Heidelberg, and tell you how sweetly attentive they were.

Widow of an Indian officer very high in the service, and a charming daughter about the age of dear Madolin."

Yes, Sir David thought he did remember.

"Well, a year or two ago they returned to England, and were travelling about for their health. You know poor dear Mrs. Regison ruined her constitution in India, and they came to a house near Matchborough on account of the moorland air; and as soon as ever I heard of it I wrote to Madolin, requesting her to lose no time in driving over to call upon them—such very nice people, you know, and so very attentive. And, would you believe it, she excused herself from doing anything of the sort."

Sir David could quite believe it. Princess Madolin had not been mistress of Nunthorpe Chase for seven years without convincing most people there that she intended her will to be law.

"I never interfere with my daughter's arrangements," he said, in a deprecatory sort of way. "You know she is a little headstrong, and I find it better to allow her to follow her own inclinations."

"Exactly so, David. But I think you will agree with me that there are occasions when the inclinations of a member of the family might be considered a little. However, I do not intend to take Madolin's opinion upon the subject again. I have had a letter this morning from Mrs. Regison, sent on here by my people in London, from which I find that she is in this neighbourhood a second time, for her own and Gertrude's health, and I intend to take the matter into my own hands, and call upon her, without consulting Madolin at all."

"The best thing for you to do, Griselda."

"And I suppose, David, if I tell her that we shall be glad to see her at the Chase,

you will not think that I am infringing either upon your privacy or that of your daughter?"

"Not in the least. In fact, it would be a real relief to me if we did have a few guests occasionally. I have almost now ceased to mention the subject to Madolin—she repels it so decidedly; but there is nothing I should like better than something to vary our everlasting *tête-à-têtes*."

"I knew that, David, dear. And it is entirely on that account that even the presence of a person like Miss Meredith is welcome. There is just one other thing I should like to mention. You know there was an invitation from the Milbanks this morning for dinner on the 25th to meet Mrs. Regison, and I believe Madolin was going to decline for herself. However, I told her that I did not think you would allow such a slight to be offered to me in your house."

“Certainly not, Griselda. It is Madolin’s place to accompany you, and I shall expect her to do so.”

“Thank you ; I was sure you would. And dear Mrs. Regison is so very anxious to renew the intimacy. Such delightful friends as they would be too, for Madolin. I believe it is nothing but her foolish pride which prevents her from calling upon them. You know she was dreadfully irritated about that wretched affair at Heidelberg ; in fact, fires up if I mention it to her in the mildest way, and of course Mrs. Regison knows that she encouraged Jetsam a little too much. She must learn, however, to conquer such feelings when they interfere with the comfort of those about her.”

And Miss Griselda, who, of course, never missed an opportunity of conquering her own feelings when they interfered with the comfort of those about her, retired, feeling

that, on the whole, the conversation had been very successful.

Next morning, somewhat to her chagrin, there was a letter from Uncle Mac. He had sailed sooner than he expected, was in London, and intended, as soon as possible, to pay his respects to Sir David. Perhaps he might be in the neighbourhood for a few days before coming to stay at the Chase; but, at all events, he should call in the course of a week or two.

And now that Miss Meredith must be put down at the earliest opportunity.

CHAPTER XII.

AUNT GRISELDA thought no one could perform that delicate office with so much tact as herself. Accordingly she jotted down a few remarks which might be useful, and waited her opportunity.

It fell out a day or two before the Milbank dinner-party. Sir David chanced (a very rare chance indeed for him) to be busy with his daughter, looking over some plans for workmen's cottages on the estate. Whereupon Miss Griselda suggested to Hope that they should avail themselves of the lovely May morning to take a turn in the Park.

"You know I always think Sir David and Miss Lauderdale must like to be left alone occasionally," she began, by way of introduction to more personal remarks. "Guests, of course, are very well in their way, but I am always careful not to intrude upon the privacy of my friends. It is oppressive, sometimes, to feel that you must keep up conversation whether you are disposed to do so or not."

Hope assented, not seeing any special drift in the remark, and the two ladies set out upon their walk.

It was a sweet spring morning. A soft, bloomy green was beginning to peep forth upon the old elm-trees of the Chase. There were violets and primroses scattered up and down the mossy woodland paths, with beds of wild hyacinth, and here and there, farther down by the stream, a solitary Lent lily, blooming long past its time, and carry-

ing Easter memories almost into the snowy dawn of Whit-tide. And the breath of the slowly-coming summer breathed warm and soft across the slopes of gorse and heather, and everywhere there was a strong pulse of life beating and bounding in Nature's veins, as though she had suddenly awakened, full-rested and refreshed, from her winter sleep, and could scarce work brightly or cheerily enough now that the night of her idleness had passed away.

Hope felt it in her own veins too. She wanted to jump and spring and stretch herself. Two months of perfect rest at Nunthorpe Chase had brought the roses back to her cheeks, and the brightness to her eyes, and she felt as if she must have some outlet for the life which was so strongly stirring within her. Oh, for a run up and down those heathery slopes, if only Miss Griselda had not been there, or for a romp with Leo

and Chit, the retrievers, who were crossing the park at the heels of one of the game-keepers. And when they passed under the drooping branch of a sycamore, she could scarcely keep from catching hold of it and swinging herself into the tree, as she used to do at her grandfather's farm of Willowaste—how much more delightful an exercise than keeping step with Miss Griselda, and listening to her everlasting hints and admonitions, which were doubtless intended as tonic bitters, but had much more the effect of mosquito bites.

“A little slower, Miss Meredith, if you please,” said the old lady, with a touch of dignity. “It is inconvenient to me to hurry. In fact, I was obliged to send away my last companion in London entirely on account of her rapid manner of walking. It is so exceedingly difficult to meet with a person who quite understands your ways. I dare-

say you did not often walk out with Miss Asgard."

"Oh! yes, but she always rode in a Bath chair; and I just walked as fast or as slow as I liked, so long as I did not go out of sight."

"Poor thing!" said Miss Griselda, not indicating, however, to whom the remark was applicable. "Rather tedious, I should think, for you, my dear; and it is a very shut-up little place down there at The Hollows."

"Yes—it was so full of things, too. The house always smelt of calico and blankets and brown paper. You know Miss Asgard was so very benevolent."

"Of course; and found plenty for you to do, no doubt. It must have been a delightful change when dear Madolin asked you out here for a week or two. So kind of her, was it not?"

“Yes, very,” said Hope, making a flying leap over a little running stream, in quest of an iris blossom on the other side, and then springing back to her astonished companion. “I don’t think I was ever in such a pretty place before.”

“Most likely not. People generally admire Nunthorpe Chase very much. I used to live here myself when dear Madolin was quite a child, and greatly I enjoyed the beauty and privacy of the place. It is so delightful, you know, to be able to take your walks in any direction without having to meet common people, as you must do if you go into the village. And I believe now Sir David is more particular than ever about trespassers. My niece is so very much annoyed if she meets strangers in the grounds.”

“Yes,” said Hope, with rather a bored expression. This first walk with excellent

Miss Griselda was turning out anything but brilliant. "Miss Lauderdale told me there was nothing she hated so much as to meet people in the park when she happened to be walking out."

"Did she? Ah! I see she has quite taken you into her confidence. You know my niece has peculiar tastes. As I was telling you before, I used to make my home here some time ago; but since my residence in town, I have only come down for occasional visits, and not very long ones."

Miss Griselda was coming to the pith of her discourse now, and had taken Hope's arm, in order that that young person might not break the conversation by any more flying leaps after iris blossoms.

"Not very long ones. I always avoid long visits at the Chase, because Miss Lauderdale soon tires of company."

"She told me she never had any to tire

of," said Hope; "and that was why she wished me to stay with her all the summer."

"Then I should not advise you to do it. You know the constant obligation to entertain guests soon becomes a tax. No doubt my niece enjoys it just at present, but by-and-by——"

"Unless indeed," Miss Griselda continued, with a series of her favourite little mysterious nods and smiles—"unless indeed there is some definite arrangement between you. You understand me, Miss Meredith, I am sure. Of course, if my niece finds that she requires the services of an educated and intelligent person like yourself, it would give me the greatest possible satisfaction to know that you had taken up your permanent residence at the Chase. There are so many things in which Miss Lauderdale would find you invaluable. I always say, you know, that anyone who has been accustomed to

attend upon others, and make herself useful in all sorts of little ways, is so very desirable in a house."

"Oh! but," said Hope, innocently, "I am not going to be companion to Miss Lauderdale, if that is what you mean. I mean to train for a nurse in one of the London hospitals when I leave here."

"Indeed!—very praiseworthy, very praiseworthy indeed. Nothing pleases me so much as for young people to set themselves against being a burden to others. If I might trouble you to carry my muff for me, Miss Meredith; I find myself rather incommoded with it. You see, the sun has great power just now. And I think, if it does not make any difference to you, we will walk a little more slowly. I am afraid I am troublesome, but most likely you have got into the habit of rapid walking from generally having had an errand in view

when you have gone out. Now, you see, when I take my walks, it is simply for the sake of the air."

And to make disagreeable remarks to other people, thought Hope, but she did not say so.

"Yes, simply for the air, and so I like to take it as leisurely as possible. I have always considered very rapid walking as a characteristic of common people. But, my dear——"

And Miss Griselda came to a dead stop, keeping a tight hold of her companion's arm, in order that she might do the same.

"Who can that be coming along in the distance? My eyesight is not very good. A gamekeeper, do you think, or is he a trespasser? Exceedingly annoying, when all the people about here know that Sir David is so very particular. I believe he is a trespasser. Now that I look more

closely, I am quite sure he has not the air and bearing of a gentleman."

"Perhaps he is coming from the Milbanks' place at Rossbury," suggested Hope. "There is a short cut across the park from one of their meadows, and Miss Lauderdale said Sir David had given them leave to use it."

"Excuse me, Miss Meredith, I am rarely mistaken. It strikes me he is a low sort of person from Matchborough. They are often seen prowling about here when Sir David is in town, and no doubt the fellow fancies we are all away. Ever since that wretched affair at Heidelberg, I have had a perfect horror of such people. Of course we are perfectly safe; he can do us no harm, but I shall certainly tell him there are traps upon the premises."

Miss Griselda drew herself up, girded her shawl tightly about her, and marched for-

ward with the air of a British female who is prepared to face death at the cannon's mouth.

The stranger, who was somewhat carelessly dressed, and had a quantity of fishing-tackle about him, slackened his pace as he approached the ladies.

"There ! he is actually going to speak to us. I told you he was a trespasser. There are always gamekeepers about," she said, in a high-pitched tone of indignation, as the terrible unknown raised his cap.

"Thank you," he replied, giving the tackle a swing over his shoulder. "Perhaps one of them will be able to tell me if there is a short cut to the fir plantation."

"*Sir !*" said Miss Griselda, with all the dignity of which a Lauderdale was capable, "this park is strictly private."

"All right, madam. I only want the stream down by the plantation. I will go

on until I find some one to direct me."

And away he went.

"Insufferable impertinence!" hissed Miss Griselda.

Hope could scarcely contain her amusement. The whole affair was so supremely comical. The stranger's coolness, the lady's indignation, could not have been surpassed; and she felt so sure, too, that, for once in her life, Aunt Griselda had been mistaken. She just lingered a moment to tell the stranger that there was a short cut past one of the woodmen's huts to the fir plantation, and then rejoined her companion, who was walking on with the majesty of a whole battalion of police concentrated in her single person.

"Miss Meredith, it would have been more prudent to have passed on in perfect silence. We shall have to cross that path ourselves, on our way home, and who can tell what

the man may be loitering there for ? I am convinced that his intentions are dishonest."

"Then I have done the prudentest thing in the world," said Hope, "for he will have to go straight past one of the workmen's huts, and if he is doing wrong he will be found out."

But Miss Griselda was sternly silent. In her opinion Miss Meredith was a young person who required a great deal of putting down, and she should have it too. If a Lauderdale woman could not do it, she should like to know who could.

"I daresay you won't mind," she resumed after a while, in a bright, cheery tone, as if what she was going to say was the very sweetest thing that could be said under the circumstances. "I daresay you won't mind spending an evening by yourself occasionally. My niece does not go out very often ; indeed

I tell her she secludes herself much more than a lady of her position ought to do, but still now and then she exchanges visits with the people about here, which involve an occasional invitation to dinner, and, of course, you would not—you understand what I mean, I daresay, without my going farther into the subject.”

“Oh, yes, thank you; you mean that the people won’t expect me, too. I’m sure I don’t want to go, and so it is all right.”

“Yes, I knew it would be. You understand about all these little matters, I am sure. I should not have mentioned it just now, only there is a dinner engagement next week at the Milbanks. Delightful people the Milbanks; I believe they used to call sometimes upon Miss Asgard, but perhaps she would not expect you to be in the room at such times.”

“Yes, she did; and I remember the Mil-

banks very well. Once Miss Milbank came too, and we had a long talk about the Matchborough Hospital. She has a great desire to be a trained nurse herself, and so she was very anxious to hear all I could tell her about it. And in the note which came to Miss Lauderdale yesterday, Mrs. Milbank asked if I would go too, so I shall not need to stay at home by myself."

Hope said this with a delightful little touch of sauciness, which, however piquant in itself, was almost the most irritating thing Miss Griselda had ever experienced since that wretched affair at Heidelberg. Really the girl was like an air-ball; the more you tried to knock her down, the higher she rose.

"But I don't so very much care to go," she continued; "Miss Milbank will be busy with the other people, and will not want to be talking to me; and besides, I never was

at a real dinner-party in my life. I don't know at all what I ought to do."

"Most likely not. I daresay in your position you would feel a little awkward. Still you know it was very kind of them to have asked you, though I daresay they did it to please my niece; of course they knew an attention to you would gratify her, though I think, my dear, at the same time, if you take my advice you will remain at home. I should never accept complimentary invitations if I were in your place. It is so much more dignified to maintain your own position, whatever it may be."

"What a disagreeable old woman you are!" thought Hope, whistling to a squirrel who was running up a tree; and she was very glad to be able to suggest that, as the wind had veered to the east, it would be advisable for them to return by a shorter cut than going round by the fir plantation.

“Oh, dear! my muff at once, please, then and we will return immediately. There is nothing so unpleasant to me as east wind.”

“Yes,” said Hope, drily; “and if you talk whilst you are facing it, you will most likely have bronchitis again. The doctor at the Matchborough Hospital always said that people took cold in that way sooner than any other.”

Aunt Griselda, whose prudence was always in advance of her perception, retired, Minerva-like, behind the ægis of a thick Shetland veil, and ventured not another remark. So that, of Hope's share in the morning's experiences, it might very truly be said, “better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof!”

CHAPTER XIII.

THEN came the little dinner at Rossbury, where the Regisons, who had been now a month or two at Matchborough, were to be introduced to the *élite* of the neighbourhood.

Miss Lauderdale did not go, after all, a headache having mercifully interposed its pain between her and the far worse agony of Mrs. Regison's reminiscences. But she would have Hope into her own room when the eventful process of dressing began, and Catton—who loved Miss Meredith for the brightness she had brought into that else

cold and desolate house—was sent for to ensure a successful result. Tossie, too, who was now quite established at the Chase, and promised to outrun her teacher as a quick and tasteful lady's maid, was there with her needle and thread, ready for action.

The black silk dress which had been doing duty on state occasions ever since poor Mrs. Meredith's death, eight months before, and which was likely enough, seeing the condition of Hope's finances, to continue that office for an indefinite time, was brought out for Miss Lauderdale to inspect. A knot of ribbon was put here, a fold shaped there, the neck cut out a little lower, to show the wearer's fair round throat, the sleeves looped up to let her arms come into sight.

"One might think Miss Meredith was an old maid of fifty, by the way she covers herself up," said Catton, "and those pretty dimpled elbows, as I'm sure many a duchess

would give a thousand a year for them. I only wish *some* folks thought as little of setting themselves off."

And Catton darted a somewhat severe glance at Tossie, who, with her pretty head on one side, and the back of her hand to her mouth, was watching the performance with intense interest. Oh! if *she* could have a dress cut square in the front!—for was not her throat as white as the whitest and as fair as the fairest of them all?

"But them that's born to it often don't think anything at all. Now, Madam, isn't it a shame that Miss Meredith doesn't make more of herself?"

"Of course it is, Catton, and we mean to make her behave better now. And, Hope, listen to me. I insist upon a cluster of scarlet geranium for your hair, and another for the bosom of your dress, and another to knot in amongst that drapery on the skirt.

Tossie, run down to the gardener directly, and ask him to make you up three little bunches of geranium. He must pick them out of the purest scarlet, not a bit of that crimson or pink amongst them, all exactly the same shade; and bring them here to me directly."

"Yes, ma'am," and away flew Tossie, but she did not mean to bring them back "directly," for had not young Rayson, one of the hot-house men, looked upon her sometimes with sweet eyes, and was not five minutes of flirtation with him, amongst the perfume of roses and heliotrope, better even than seeing Miss Meredith dressed for the Milbank dinner-party?

Hope, standing before the mirror, looked as pretty as need be in her red dressing-jacket and short white petticoat; and if a duchess might have envied the dimpled elbows, she might have envied still more

the masses of thick black hair which the girl was twisting coil upon coil round her head. It was astonishing how nice Hope could make that hair look, when she tried. Miss Lauderdale was still turning the dress over and over.

“Catton must puff a quantity of white tulle round the neck. It is a thousand pities you never had a dress cut properly before, Hope; and we must have some more put for ruffles to the sleeves. You might look as nice as anybody in the world, child, if you would only give your mind to it.”

“Well, I mean to do so now; but no one has ever taken any pains with me yet, or cared whether I was nicely dressed or not. The only thing has been to make my clothes last as long as they would.”

“Just as if they would not last ever so much longer if you helped them out with

little bits of ornament here and there. You know once—Catton is out of the room, is she not?—once, when we lived at Heidelberg, I was very poor indeed, but still I always managed to look nice.”

“I should think you did,” said Hope, with a glance of love’s reverence towards the calm, proud face, so keen, clear, finished in its every line. “You would look nice in anything. But then things are very different at Heidelberg.”

“How do you know?” asked Madolin, sharply.

“Oh, I know well enough. I was there for a year at school. Mamma thought I should most likely have to earn my living by teaching, and I went there to learn French and German.”

“Indeed! Strange that we never happened to talk about it. And when were you there?”

“I suppose about seven years ago. I was thirteen or fourteen then; and now I am just twenty.”

“The very time we were there. I may, perhaps, have seen you sometimes, without knowing it, when we were sitting out under those linden-trees, where all the people used to gather in summer evenings.”

“I don’t know, but I think very likely I may have seen you, for we used to pass the Pension Martel every day when the girls went for their walk; and I saw people sauntering about in the beautiful garden. What a beautiful garden it was!”

“Very,” said Madolin, with a gesture of sudden pain. “But here comes Tossie with the flowers.”

Half an hour later Hope stood forth as bonnie a maiden as one could wish to see, even in the Lauderdale set.

“I declare Miss Meredith looks quite the

lady," said Aunt Griselda, who, severe in bristling black *moiré* and point lace, came into her niece's room to make sure that this middle-class girl would not disgrace the Milbank drawing-room. "People ought to be thankful who can wear scarlet; it gives such a delightful finish to a dress. Really no one would have thought that that old black silk would have come out so well."

But Miss Griselda was even more astonished, not to say disconcerted, at the simple, easy, well-bred manner with which Hope bore herself at Rossbury during the difficult interval which lapsed before the announcement of dinner.

"A friend of Miss Lauderdale, I presume," said delightful Mrs. Regison, as she and Sir David's sister shook their lappets and ringlets in each other's faces in a cosy sofa corner. "A pleasant style of girl; perhaps a trifle heavy, but still quite inter-

esting. Connection of the Merediths of Castle Overay, perhaps?"

"Oh, dear, no," answered Miss Griselda, in a confidential whisper, "nothing of the sort. In fact, my dear Mrs. Regison, it is quite an annoyance to me that my niece has taken such a fancy to her; but you know what Madolin is in the choice of her companions."

"Of course, we all remember poor Jet-sam. Dreadfully unpleasant affair, was it not? But you know, Miss Griselda, I never concealed, even from yourself, my opinion that she gave him a little too much encouragement. What can a man do when a lovely and brilliant girl allows him to attend upon her at concerts and all that sort of thing? And so she is not one of the Merediths of Castle Overay?"

"On the contrary, my dear Mrs. Regison, her father was a doctor at Match-

borough. Madolin picked her up six months ago, one morning while she was calling upon Miss Asgard, an old lady who lived down at Nunthorpe Hollows. Miss Meredith was living with her as companion, and when the old lady died last February, she must have taken a situation of some kind if my niece had not brought her to the Chase. Very kind of her, was it not? But not at all what I should have done under the circumstances. As if any one who had been asked to stay indefinitely at such a place as my brother's, would be in a hurry to look out for anything else. I tell Madolin she will find it very difficult to bring the visit to an end."

"Most likely," said Mrs. Regison, "I shall give Gertrude a hint not to be too familiar with her. They seem to be chatting away now as if they had known each other all their lives. Do you know, Miss Griselda, I

am really quite hungry? I am sure it must be past the proper time for dinner. I suppose we are waiting for Captain Cayley, as he has not put in an appearance yet."

"Captain Cayley! What, our relative from Canada? You surely do not mean to say that he is here, and we are to meet him this evening?"

"Oh! what a mistake I have made!" and Mrs. Regison dropped her fan and clasped her hands in dismay. "Mrs. Milbank told me I was not on any account to mention it, as she wished to give you a little surprise. I am so sorry. He came down two or three days ago, and called at the Chase, but everyone was out, and he would not leave a card, because he wanted to see if you would know him again. However, if I had not said anything, it would have been just the same, for here he comes."

And a very widely-opened door, and a

flutter of expectation among the ladies, announced the entrance of Captain Cayley, the unappropriated Canadian of good family and easy position, who might possibly have other business in his trip to England than that of negotiating for the purchase of land in the far west.

"I should not have recognised him in the least," said Aunt Griselda, as Uncle Mac apologised to the lady of the house for being a moment or two late. It was the fault of the train, which had landed him at Nunthorpe station half an hour past his time. "But then you know it is twenty years at the very least since he was staying at the Chase; and he was quite a boy then. Rather rough and ready in his manners, I fancy, but of course you must make allowances for people living out there."

This last remark arose from the circumstance that, just at that moment Mac burst

into a hearty laugh, which was taken up on a more subdued scale by Miss Meredith, and greatly shocked Aunt Griselda's sense of propriety. It was not the custom for ladies and gentlemen to laugh quite so merrily when presented for the first time; and she wondered what Mrs. Milbank or Gertrude Regison would think about it. Besides, if her sight did not deceive her, there had been no formal introduction at all. A strange thing—very strange! She must have an understanding with Miss Meredith about it.

For Hope had recognised Uncle Mac at once as the "suspicious stranger" whom Miss Griselda had so unceremoniously warned off as a trespasser only a day or two before; and Uncle Mac had recognised her too, and the merry twinkle in his blue eyes had kindled into a smile, helped by the light of hers; and then and there, without wait-

ing for anyone to name them to each other, he had taken her hand and was shaking it in true Canadian fashion. And then he told the little story to Mrs. Milbank, who, enjoying a bit of fun as keenly as anyone, brought him up to Aunt Griselda, and waited for the *dénouement*.

“I hope I may be forgiven for trespassing upon the private grounds of Nunthorpe Chase,” he said, bowing low over Miss Griselda’s outstretched hand. “I thought that perhaps as an old friend such a liberty might be granted me. However, I will promise not to repeat the offence.”

“Oh, dear, *dear* ! Mac, who *would* have thought it could have been you?” said the old lady, with a smile of real kindness on her face, for she loved everybody who was connected, however distantly, with the grand old Lauderdale family, and was able to do credit to the relationship. “I am sure you

must have thought me dreadfully cross and disagreeable, but you know, ever since that dreadful affair at Heidelberg, I have had a perfect horror of strange people—now, dear Mrs. Regison, *don't* you think if Captain Cayley knew about that dreadful affair at Heidelberg——”

Yes, Mrs. Regison did think so; in fact an affair like that was enough to account for any amount of suspicion. And Uncle Mac was still listening to all the particulars when dinner was announced.

Mrs. Milbank was very kind-hearted, and so was the Colonel, her husband, and not for the world would they give pain to anyone, least of all to one so simple and unassuming as Hope Meredith; but still position has its demands, and nowhere are these demands more urgent than at a modern dinner party. And as there were of course inferior places at the table, and etiquette forbade that illus-

trious strangers should be relegated to them, or married people of known importance in the neighbourhood, Hope, being neither married nor illustrious, was paired off at the close of the procession with Miss Koors, a poor relation of the Milbanks, one of those limp, ineffectual dependents who are found hanging on to most great families like dry withered leaves at the root of a lily plant, partaking neither of the fatness nor the beauty of the parent stem.

So the dinner, Hope's first introduction to fashionable life, wore to its end, and proved a very slow, wearisome affair. For Miss Koors, on her right, had no ideas beyond the weather and the things they were eating; and Miss Regison, on her left, had a perception of the exact amount of condescension proper to be bestowed on a young person who, had she not had the fortune to be taken up by proud Miss Lauderdale, must have

laboured with her own hands for a living. Moreover, Captain Cayley was Miss Regison's next chair neighbour on the other side, and she was much too wise to spend either time or attention in one direction when more might be gained by a little well-directed flattery in the other. Far too wise, also, to encourage the attempts at neighbourliness which the good Captain occasionally made for Miss Meredith's benefit. It is so easy for a clever, wide-awake woman to keep another, not quite so clever, and not nearly so wide awake, out of the conversation, and yet all the time appear perfectly courteous and affable. If poor Hope had had much conceit, great would have been the fall thereof.

Matters were not much better when the ladies withdrew. Gertrude, cut off from the stimulus of masculine society, was no longer sparkling or fascinating. Mrs. Regison was provokingly patronising. Mrs. Milbank was

absorbed by the matrons of the party. Aunt Griselda kept dropping little hints and inuendoes which narrowly escaped the verge of cruelty. Since the advent of Captain Cayley, she had begun to look upon Hope as an actual nuisance in the family ; and Miss Milbank, who would otherwise have been talking about the hospital, was obliged to devote herself to Miss Regison, as being, in the absence of the gentlemen, her own particular charge.

Hope felt her position, and was shut up accordingly. Her natural freedom and self-unconsciousness made her slow to perceive a slight ; but, once perceived, it sank deeply, making her appear shy and awkward. By-and-by she dropped almost entirely out of the conversation, and busied herself in a quiet corner behind the door, looking over some photographs.

There, upon the return of the gentlemen,

Captain Cayley found her, rather to Aunt Griselda's discomfiture. Mrs. Regison, whose daughter Gertrude was reclining gracefully on an ottoman in front of the fire, suggested that he might possibly find the neighbourhood of the door uncomfortable, but apparently he was accustomed to draughts, for he did not seem inclined to move.

"I have never had a chance of thanking you, Miss Meredith, for showing me the path through the wood down to that little stream. It was the best day's sport I have had in England."

"Which sport do you mean?" said Hope, looking up with a laugh in her honest brown eyes. "I thought what I saw was very good indeed."

"No, not Auntie Grisel. I don't mean that, though it was capital fun. Of course I knew her again as well as could be, only, when I saw her looking so majestic, it seem-

ed a pity to spoil the joke. You must not tell her, though, that I called her Auntie Griselda, or she would never forgive me."

"Why not? I hear her speak of you as Uncle Mac."

"Oh! yes, that's all right; everyone calls me Uncle Mac. But one day, when I was over here, twenty years ago, there was a Christmas tree at the Chase, and Miss Griselda got a grisly bear for her present. It was just a little too near the mark to be quite acceptable, for she was in one of her worst tempers then, I don't know what about. So there has been a little soreness on the subject ever since. I sent the bear,"—and Mac put on a comical look,—“but nobody ever found me out. Are you staying up at the Chase?”

"Yes. Miss Lauderdale says I may stay all the summer, if I like. She is very good to me."

"I don't wonder at that. I daresay you can do her a great deal of good. From what I hear, the house wants a little sunshine in it very much. It is a capital thing for Madolin that she has found some one to be a friend to her."

"Perhaps. Only Miss Griselda doesn't like me."

"Bother Miss Griselda. I beg her pardon, of course. She is very grand and stately, and all that sort of thing, but when one has been warned off like a poacher, it can't help making a little difference, you know. Tell Miss Lauderdale I am coming over again in a day or two. You are likely to be staying some time, I suppose?"

"Miss Meredith, would you mind making room for me on that couch?" said the amiable Gertrude. "The fire is scorching me dreadfully, and you do look so nice and cool."

"Of course she will, dear Gertrude. Hope, my dear, come here." And Aunt Griselda, who was discussing the *pension* with Mrs. Regison, squeezed herself up to make a place for another on her own sofa.

There was no help for it. Hope had to leave her cosy little *tête-à-tête* by the door, and repair to the torrid zone of Miss Griselda's more immediate presence, whilst Gertrude, all smiles and animation now, engaged the Canadian Captain in a brisk dialogue.

"Not quite the thing, you know," said Miss Griselda to Hope, in a whisper just loud enough for Mrs. Regison to hear. "It is better to keep joining in the general conversation. Of course you will know what to do when you have been out a little more, but I thought it kinder to mention the matter to you just now."

"Thank you very much," said Hope,

demurely, looking across to Uncle Mac. There was the merry twinkle in his eyes again, as he shrugged his broad shoulders somewhat after the manner of a grisly bear.

And now there was one thing more left for Hope's Mentor to look after. Captain Cayley was coming to stay for a few days at the Chase. Mrs. Milbank had asked Miss Meredith to spend a week at Rosbury. If these two weeks could be arranged at the same time, a great weight would be off Miss Griselda's mind. For Uncle Mac seemed quite inclined to take to Hope, and Hope, on her part, seemed equally inclined to be taken to, in which state of affairs there was no telling what might happen.

Accordingly she took the first opportunity of crossing over to Mac and having an understanding with him as to the time when he might be expected at the Chase. And

that being decided, she trotted off to Mrs. Milbank and suggested, in the most innocent manner possible, that the following Tuesday, the day before Mac's arrival at Nunthorpe, would be a very convenient time for Hope to pay her proposed visit to Rosbury; an arrangement which was received at once, and Mrs. Milbank promised to speak to Miss Meredith about it that very evening.

So far, so good. But there was just one more thing which excellent old Miss Griselda desired, and that was that Mrs. Regison and Gertrude should be received on friendly terms at the Chase. Hitherto Madolin had stood out persistently against renewing her intimacy with them, and to take up a bold position in the teeth of Madolin's will was a dangerous proceeding. But what could not be done by force might be accomplished by guile.

Auntie Griselda went back to Mrs. Regi-

son with a delightful little scheme in her head. She expatiated to that good lady at great length upon the improvements which Sir David had lately made in the Chase gardens, especially mentioning a Swiss rockery, filled with the most exquisite ferns, which was just now approaching completion. Gertrude's weak point, if she had one, was ferns, and therefore Mrs. Regison expressed by proxy her daughter's passionate desire to be permitted to see the beauties of the rockery. Aunt Griselda said they must come over some morning for luncheon, and then go round the place, and she promised that Madolin should call upon them immediately to appoint a time. This done, she trusted to her own ingenuity so to represent the state of affairs to Madolin as to make her believe that nothing else could have been done under the circumstances.

So now Miss Griselda was quite at her

ease. After that there was coffee, and then tea, and then a little playing and singing, Hope being kept judiciously under the Lauderdale wing; and then carriages were announced, and Mrs. Milbank's delightful dinner was a thing of the past.

CHAPTER XIV.

“WELL,” said Miss Lauderdale next morning, as the two sat together in the old dining-room, Aunt Griselda never rising very early the day after a party, “how did my child get on among the fashionable folk last night?”

And Madolin drew the girl closer up to her. Her love for Hope Meredith was now the one fountain of sweetness in her life. All else around her was linked with the bitter past or the bitterer future. Hope alone took her out of herself; with Hope alone could she have any sort of peace and

rest. And though almost too proud to show it, she was beginning to cling to this young girl as the weak cling to the strong, the empty to the full. There was a strange ring of love and tenderness in her voice, a mingling of the caress one gives to a child with the trust one gives to only the tried and faithful, as she asked the simple question.

“Oh! pretty well,” said Hope, quickly responding to the caress. “You know I have never been to anything of that sort before, and it seemed rather stiff. I don’t think I should have enjoyed it very much if Captain Cayley had not been there, and he was so nice and kind. And oh! Miss Lauderdale, what *do* you think? It was he whom we met when Miss Griselda and I were walking in the park, and she told him he was trespassing. I knew him again directly, and he knew me, and we could not help having a good laugh about it, and

that seemed to make us quite friends."

"Yes, papa just knocked at my door last night, to tell me Uncle Mac was here, and did not want to tell us about it, but make a little surprise. What a joke that you and Auntie Griselda should have met him before in that way. What did she do?"

"Oh! of course she looked dreadfully come down upon—at least, as much so as a lady like Miss Griselda could possibly look; but she soon recovered herself, and she excused her behaviour by saying that ever since that terrible affair at Heidelberg—you know what would come after that."

"Yes, yes," said Madolin, hastily. "And the other people—were they nice? And how did your dress look, and what did you do? Tell me everything."

"Well, there is not very much to tell. I talked to a Miss Koors, and she showed me a new stitch in knitting; and when the

ladies left the dinner-table, I got into a terribly cold corner by the drawing-room door, and Captain Cayley and I had a nice little talk for a few minutes; and then Miss Griselda beckoned me away to a seat beside her, and told me it was not the thing to be talking to a gentleman apart from the rest of the company. I don't see why it should have been so very wrong for me, though, for Miss Regison took my place, and was talking to him ever so long, and nobody seemed to think there was any harm in it."

A smile played over Madolin's face.

"And so that was all, was it?"

"Well, no, not quite. Mrs. Milbank has asked me to go next Tuesday and spend a week with her."

"Next Tuesday, Hope!—why, that is the day before papa said Mac was coming here, and I was depending upon you to amuse him. You know I *cannot* talk to people I

don't care about. Why did you arrange it so without telling me?"

"I did not arrange it at all. Miss Griselda did it for me, and, when it was done, I had only to say I would ask you. I could not make any engagement without doing *that* first."

"Of course. I think Aunt Griselda has forgotten that you are my guest, not hers; and I shall not let you be away when Mac comes, unless you wish it yourself."

"Then I don't wish it myself at all. He is very nice, and I should like to see him again. I was very sorry when Miss Griselda settled it so."

"Miss Griselda shall not settle it so. I shall write to the Milbanks to-day, and tell them I cannot spare you until at least three or four weeks from this time. I don't think it could have been Miss Milbank's own proposal."

“Miss Lauderdale!”

“Well, I always know there is something particular coming when you say ‘Miss Lauderdale’ in that way, with such a quaint little pause after it.”

“May I tell you just what I think?”

“Of course you may, child. It is exactly because you tell me what you think that I love you so much. Most people only tell me what they think I shall like, and oh! how wearisome it is!”

“Well, then, I think Miss Griselda is not very fond of me. She would rather that I did not stay with you so very long.”

“And is Miss Griselda the mistress of this house, Hope, and is she to choose for me my companions, and tell me how long they are to stay? I thought we had settled all that long ago. Do not think anything about it. If you are content, stay.”

“But I am quite strong, Miss Lauderdale,

now. Look at my cheeks ; they are not hollow any more, and I am never tired. Why should I not go away and begin my work ?”

“Because I cannot live without you, Hope. It is my peace and my rest that you should be here. Stay with me until you have taught me a little of your own brightness ; you can do no better work than that. Hope,” and Miss Lauderdale laid her delicate blue-veined hand upon her companion’s arm with a grip that left every finger-mark visible there—“Hope, are there no sicknesses but those that doctors can cure ? Is it not as kind to nurse a suffering soul as a suffering body ?”

“I did not know,” said Hope, timidly, looking up into Madolin’s face. It was calm no more. A cramp of bitter pain was tightening it. The baleful secret was working beneath. One could almost see the

contortions of the despairing heart, which longed and yet feared to buy sympathy at the cost of such terrible humiliation.

“Hope, there is no rest for me. You do not know—I cannot tell you. It is all weariness and pain. I have no friends, only a lot of people who sometimes flatter and sometimes pity me. I never hear a new thought. I never get a new idea. My life was wasting away, and you came to me, and now there is something like peace. Hope, *can you go?*”

And Miss Lauderdale, proud Miss Lauderdale, bent down, until her cheek touched Hope's; and there were tears upon them both.

Hope was surprised, but with love's true tenderness she asked no questions. That Miss Lauderdale was not happy, she had known for long. That she could supply the

want was a new joy to her. Softly caressing the hot cheek, she said,

“I will not go away so long as you want me. I will stay and be your nurse, and you shall be strong again.”

“No, Hope, not my nurse, my teacher. I was never well, so you cannot bring me back to health, but you can teach me how to be a little like yourself. Child,” and again that fierce grip upon Hope’s arm, “do you know I could sometimes almost hate you because you are so brave and bright; and because you have your strong right hand to work, and your unspoiled past and your fair future. There are none of these things for me—I have only——”

A rustle of silken garments, and Miss Griselda came in. Madolin was herself again in a moment—calm, indifferent, careless.

“Auntie, Hope has been telling me of

the dinner-party last night, and that you have made an engagement for her."

"Yes, my dear, Mrs. Milbank has been so very kind as to ask her over to Rosbury for a week. So very attentive; and I am sure Miss Meredith must feel——"

"Ah! yes, I have no doubt Miss Meredith feels everything that is proper; but I happen to feel something, too, whether it is proper or not, and I don't mean my friends to be taken away from me without my consent, and so I am going to write to Mrs. Milbank, and ask her to excuse the visit until after Uncle Mac has been here. I am depending upon Hope to entertain him."

Miss Griselda drew herself up with dignity.

"My dear, when I was a girl, young people were not supposed——"

"But they are supposed now, auntie dear," said Madolin, with that gentle raillery

which always mystified Aunt Griselda so.”
“Everything is supposed now, so we need not give ourselves any trouble. You know Hope is the only one of us who can take long walks; and she knows all about the cross-cuts in the park and the by-paths.”

“And the best places for fishing,” added Hope, with an uncontrollable spirit of mischief. “Captain Cayley said he had such an excellent day’s sport, the best in all his life.”

Miss Griselda was greatly offended, but this was not the time to make any manifestation of it. She had come into the room to arrange that little matter about the Regisons, and it was important that things should go smoothly, if possible.

“Well, dear, just settle it as you like. Mrs. Milbank is very kind. I’m sure she will not be offended. But I came to speak to you about the Regisons.”

Madolin turned her head wearily away. Those everlasting Regisons! Why had those people, of all others, planted themselves just within calling distance of the Chase?—people so knitted up with the bitterest memories of a bitter past. Renewing any sort of intimacy with them could only mean going over again, in every minutest detail, that *pension* tragedy, and she must sit still and listen, and take her part in the conversation, and hear the question of Jetsam's guilt discussed as it had already been discussed dozens of times since Aunt Griselda came, and give her opinion as to whether he would be likely to come back to England when the term of his transportation was over. Horrible! Was there to be no reprieve, no forgetting? Must one for ever be chained to the dead body of the past?

All this was in Madolin's face as she

turned again, and prepared to hear what her aunt should say.

“I think, my dear, you will be almost obliged to call upon them. I am very sorry, since it annoys you so, but Mrs. Regison expressed so strongly her desire to see the improvements which Sir David has been making in the grounds, that I could not avoid saying we should be happy to show them to her. And of course, you know, that will involve a previous call from you. They would not think of coming until that had been attended to.”

“Let us call as soon as you like, then,” said Madolin, despairingly. “To-morrow, if it must be done.”

“Thank you. And your papa thought if we asked them over to luncheon some day——”

“Oh! yes. Ask them over with their trunks and portmanteaus and bonnet-boxes

and parcels. I can bear anything. And tell them the Chase is entirely at their service, as long as they like to stay. Shall I write the note at once? Such a generous invitation would almost do away with any necessity for a preliminary call."

"Madolin, my dear, you distress me greatly. If I had had the least idea."

"Which you never do have, auntie. Your ideas are always so great. Well, then, suppose we make the call to-morrow, and leave the luncheon in the dim future."

"Exactly, my dear. Only as my stay here is not likely to be prolonged to an indefinite extent—indeed, I was saying to Miss Meredith only the other day that I considered long visits an impertinence——"

"They are not so impertinent as uncalled for remarks, Aunt Griselda," said Madolin, with a dangerous flash in her eyes. "But please go on about the luncheon."

“I thought perhaps it would not be too much trouble to give me an early opportunity of cultivating an acquaintance which has always been exceedingly pleasant to me.”

Madolin rang the bell.

“Tell Harrison we shall want the open carriage at three this afternoon.”

“There, auntie; and the luncheon may be the day after to-morrow. Peace be upon us. Should you like any one else asked?”

“No, my dear,” said Miss Griselda, with the air of a martyr; “and it is very kind of you to have made the arrangement. I fancied you had liked the Regisons. You used to be very intimate with them at the *pension*. I am sure that evening when you were acting charades with Gertrude and——”

“Oh! auntie, never mind. It is all right that they should come, only you know it is

such a bore to me to entertain company. Hope, show Aunt Griselda the new stitch that Miss Koors taught you last night—it would be the very thing for a sofa blanket. And in stripes, too, which are the joy and delight of your soul.”

That brought Miss Griselda completely round. She was proof against most things, but a new stitch in knitting opened the deepest fountains of her content. Hope brought pins and wool; Madolin leaned back and shut her eyes. For awhile nothing was heard but mysterious whispers about seaming, throwing over, casting off, narrowing, putting on. At last Miss Griselda announced herself mistress of the subject, and then Hope went away to feed the chickens, her favourite morning employment.

Her absence was an opportunity which must not be neglected.

“My dear Madolin, it was impossible for me to explain matters in the presence of Miss Meredith, but I had my own reasons, in which I think you will agree, for arranging that visit to Rossbury at the time I did. As I said to you once before, Miss Meredith is not a child ; and though you may consider her behaviour in the highest degree innocent and guileless, yet the girl who would dash across into a by-path with an utter stranger to show him the way to a fish-pond, is scarcely what I should call finished in the social proprieties of our class. And from what I saw last night, it appears to me that she is quite ready to accept, and even invite any attentions from Captain Cayley.”

“My dear aunt, why in the world should she not accept them, if they are offered ?”

“Because, Madolin, it would not be proper. Your own sense of what is right and just might tell you that. It is absurd

to suppose that a man like Captain Cayley has come to England for no other purpose than to see after buying land for a public company. And with yourself and Miss Regison as yet——”

“Stop, aunt, if you please. We will have no more of that. Miss Regison, with eighteen years’ experience of husband-hunting, may very safely be left to look after her own interests; and if you are building castles in the air on *my* account, I tell you, once for all, that you need not give yourself the trouble. From what I hear of Uncle Mac, I have no doubt he is a very good fellow, but I have told you many, many times that I shall not marry.”

“I don’t see why it should be so. I am sure your papa would be delighted to see you comfortably settled in life.”

“Then I am sorry not to be able to gratify him. But we will let this subject

drop. And please, Aunt Griselda, remember that Hope Meredith is my guest, and I love her very much. And though you look down upon her and call her a middle-class person, and all that sort of thing, she has done me more good since she came to stay with us than anyone I have ever known in my life. And, truly," continued Madolin, with a bitter smile, "I have known some who have not done me much good. And it is my wish that you say nothing to Hope which might in any way make her uncomfortable."

"Dear me, Madolin, you need not take me up so. I am sure I do not wish to make her uncomfortable. I only think that, if she has to work for her own living, the sooner she sets about it the better."

"She is working for her own living now, aunt, and she is working for mine, too; working for it far more unselfishly than any

of the fine friends you are so anxious for me to cultivate. I only wish it were in my power to give back to her a little of the treasure she gives to me every day of her life here."

Miss Griselda looked astonished. It was seldom indeed that Madolin Lauderdale put such heart into her words as thrilled and trembled through them now.

"Aunt Griselda," she said, "be true to yourself. Can you not own a fair, sweet nature when you meet it? Can you not be proud to clasp hands with a lady, even though the hands have worked until a little of their beauty is gone? Must a girl be the product of centuries of idleness and land-owning before she is good enough to have a smile from ourselves? What have I ever done in my life that I should stand above Hope Meredith?"

"You have never done anything, my

dear," said Aunt Griselda with dignity, "to lower your position as a lady. In fact it would be impossible for a Lauderdale to do that."

Madolin shivered.

"You are feeling the draught, my dear. It is astonishing how cold the winds are down here, even in May. I should have the sand-bags put down again if I were you. But, as I was going to say, do you not think matters had better remain as I arranged them? Will it not be advisable for Miss Meredith to go to the Milbanks next Tuesday?"

"No, aunt. It will be advisable for Miss Meredith to stay with me."

And there the matter ended.

CHAPTER XV.

FOR once Miss Griselda was foiled. But it is possible to sustain a slight defeat in the front ranks whilst an advantage is gained in the rear. Of course, as Miss Meredith, designing girl ! had been so wishful to keep Captain Cayley to herself on the evening of the dinner, she would be equally anxious to go and make her call at Rossbury whilst he was staying there, and that at any rate could be put a stop to.

Fortune favoured Aunt Griselda in her plan for putting a stop to it. The afternoon of the proposed call upon Mrs. Regison

turned out wet, and the order for the carriage had to be countermanded. Miss Griselda suggested next day. That was arranged. Of course there would be no need to ask Miss Meredith to join them, and the wily old lady intended, after Mrs. Regison had been disposed of, to propose a call at Rossbury. Madolin, knowing it must be made, would be glad to have it off her mind at once; and so, without the least appearance of unkindness or inattention, Miss Meredith would be disappointed of what she had evidently set her heart upon, another opportunity of flirting with her new acquaintance.

And lest Madolin should be drawn to invite Hope's company for the drive, Aunt Griselda suggested that the little pony-carriage, which only held two, and a boy behind, should be used. So everything fitted in as conveniently as could be, and Hope

was left behind to amuse herself as well as she could by a long ramble in the park.

Just the last thing she should have amused herself with, if Aunt Griselda had known that Uncle Mac intended to amuse himself in the same manner, and in the very same part of the park, too. For it so chanced, as Hope in her felt hat and shepherd's plaid was careering along over the short crisp heather, on the north side of the fir plantation, she encountered the suspicious-looking stranger, with fishing-tackle and accoutrements, making for the stream to which he had been guided a few days before.

"You see I have made good use of your directions, he said, laughingly, as he lifted his cap, and shook hands with her. "I have been here nearly every day since you showed me the way. I thought perhaps I might happen to meet you some time."

"No. Miss Lauderdale and I generally

go out towards the moors. It is more picturesque there, only rather lonely when one is by oneself. When Miss Griselda wants a walk we come here, because it is more sheltered."

"Do you fish?"

"No; but I like to see other people do it," answered Hope, quite unconscious that she was thus opening rather wide a gate for what Aunt Griselda would have called "attentions."

"Then you might as well stay here with me a little while, and afterwards I will walk over to the house with you. I have not seen Miss Lauderdale yet, for everyone was out when I called. Shall I find anyone at home this morning?"

"Not just now. Miss Lauderdale and Miss Griselda have gone for a drive. They are to call upon the Regisons."

"And why have you not gone too?"

“First, because the pony-carriage only holds two, besides the boy; and, second, because Miss Griselda did not want me to go.”

“Very unkind of Miss Griselda, but I’m not at all sorry she did not want you to go this morning. Do you like being at the Chase?”

“I did like it very much indeed, until Miss Griselda came. I don’t think I like it quite so much now. You know she is always trying to make me understand that I am not quite so good as the rest of the people about here. I told her once I did understand that quite well, but she seems to think I ought to be told it over and over again.”

“And why are you not as good?”

“Because my father was only a doctor.”

“Only! What a shocking thing! I am not sure that I ever heard anything so

shocking in all my life!" And Mac's eyes laughed merrily enough, though all the rest of his face was as grave as possible. The merriment died out, however, as Hope went on—

"Mamma was very poor too, and when she died I was obliged to do something for a living; but I was not quite strong enough then, so I came to the Hollows to stay with Miss Asgard, but she died too, and still I was not strong enough, and Miss Lauderdale asked me to come here for awhile."

"Poor little girl! So you are delicate. Then perhaps that was the reason Miss Griselda was so very anxious you should not sit in that draughty corner by the door, when you and I were having a chat the other night."

"Perhaps," said Hope, demurely.

"And you have to earn your own living. Well, there are worse things than that. I

daresay Madolin would be happier if she had to work for herself. But here we are at the stream. Now as you don't seem to have anything better to do, will you hold this fishing-rod for me? Here is an old stump of a tree for you to sit upon. And I am sure by the look of you, you like to make yourself useful."

Hope came forward, and, seating herself, was instructed how to hold the rod.

"Now you know, if you get a bite."

"Oh! but that is a very great if," said Hope. "Sir David complains that he can never catch anything in this part of the stream. There are more of them a little further down."

"Never mind, it is prettier here, and we are more shaded from the wind. Now tell me what you are going to do when you earn your own living."

"I am going to a hospital to train for a

nurse. I know a little about it already, for I have often been with Miss Archer in the dressing-rooms at the Matchborough Infirmary, and I like it very much."

"Like what? Seeing the poor people in pain?"

"No; helping them out of their pain, or making it easier for them to bear."

"I should think you would only have to look at them to do that," said Uncle Mac, who was beginning to think, foolish fellow! that he should not mind having rather a bad accident himself, if little Hope Meredith would help him through with it. "But you are not holding that rod steady. Take both hands to it. If you let it shake about in that way you will frighten the fish away."

"I suppose it doesn't frighten them then, if you throw little bits of stick into the water, because that's what you have been doing ever since you began to talk to me."

"Is it? I'm sure I didn't know. I suppose I was thinking about something else. But what you have got to do is to mind your own business and hold that rod as steady as one of the oak trees in the Chase, whether I throw bits of stick into the water or not. And you are not to make such saucy little remarks any more. One would think you had never had a Miss Griselda to keep you in your place."

"I am quite sure there are no Miss Griseldas where *you* come from," said Hope, with a pretty toss of her head, "or you would be able to keep your place better."

In answer to which piece of sauciness Uncle Mac gave the fishing line a sudden jerk, which cast a lot of water up into her face. What would Aunt Griselda have said if she had seen such performances? And then there was silence for a little while, Mac watching the pretty dark face over which

alternate lights and shadows of fun and thoughtfulness were passing.

"If you please," said Hope at last, "it is rather cold sitting here, and I came out for a walk."

"Did you? Then I suppose you must have one," said Uncle Mac, looking rather disappointed, for he could have staid there till nightfall, and asked no other amusement than Hope Meredith, or listening to her quaint innocent talk. "I might have known that you would be cold. You English girls are such tender little plants."

"I am not a tender plant at all," said Hope, getting up and broadening her chest and tossing her head back as she stood there amongst the shadows of the chestnut leaves, a perfect picture of health and strength and maidenly self-reliance. "I'm sure your Canadian girls are not a bit better than I am, only I don't want to sit here until my

hands are like pieces of stone, because the fish never will bite whilst you throw sticks into the water, and so its only make-believe."

"Come along, then," and Mac began to pack up his things. "I mustn't take these up to the house, though. I'll leave them at one of the woodmen's huts, and then they'll be ready when I come to stay at the Chase. You know I'm coming next Wednesday, and perhaps you can put some warm things on then, and a thick pair of gloves, and we can have a regular day's fishing."

"Very well," said Hope, delighted to find herself in motion again; "only I must have an understanding that you don't throw pieces of stick into the water, and then say you didn't know what you were doing."

"You may have what understanding you like, only come. I want you to tell me all about that hospital, and what you are going to do in it. Are you quite sure that it isn't

the fishing that you dislike, but only the sitting still in the cold?"

"Yes, and being told that I fish badly, when the fault is all on your side. I don't like that, either."

"You little pertinacious thing! I will promise never to play with bits of stick again when I am fishing with you. Come along. Shall we go up to the top of the moor?"

"No, I think it is about time for me to go home. I have a lot of things to do before Miss Lauderdale comes back."

"Then I will go with you. Quick march or slow?"

"Oh, quick."

And then came for Hope the pleasantest walk she had ever had in her life—pleasanter than even those long leisurely rambles in which she and Madolin had talked their hearts out to each other, and in which the sweet happiness of doing good, of giving

quiet and comfort to one who sorely needed both, had been hers. Ah! how quickly one learns the great lesson! Five days ago a stranger to him, and now so happy at his side! But Hope knew nothing about the lesson, nor that she was learning it, nor that, once learned, it could never be unlearned, nor that, having once looked forth into that sunshine, the mere doing of duty could never again quite content her. That May morning walk, with Mac by her side, was cleaving as with a sparkling line of light her future from her past. On one side cheerful, healthy, wholesome rest—the rest of busy, untroubled activity; on the other side—but that could only be told as the days gave their light upon it.

“But you said they were not at home, didn’t you?”

“Who?—Miss Lauderdale and Miss Griselda? Yes.”

“Then what’s the use of my going in? Sir David out, too?”

“Yes—something about the labourers’ cottages.”

“Then I’ll go back again. My compliments to the ladies, and tell them I’ll come the day after to-morrow. Luncheon at two, I suppose?”

“Yes, two.”

“And you’ll be at home?”

“I suppose so.”

“That settles it. Then I’ll come. Good-bye.”

CHAPTER XVI.

“**A** VERY pleasant call,” said Miss Griselda, coming into the dining-room half an hour later, a shapeless mass of furs and wraps and comforters. “The Regisons were delighted to see us—such kind people, so very affable and chatty! And I don’t know whether you will thank me for it or not, Miss Meredith, but I saved you the trouble of a visit to Rosbury. After we left the Regisons, I suggested to Miss Lauderdale that we should drive round in that direction, as a call from her was of course necessary under the circumstances, and I

apologised for you. Mrs. Milbank desired her kind remembrances. Captain Cayley was out. I do think, Madolin, it is a little uncourteous of him not to call upon us."

"Oh! aunt, don't worry about it. Mac is not the sort of person to stand upon ceremony. He knows that he will be welcome whenever he comes."

"Yes, my dear; but there is a degree of respect which is due to your papa's position."

"And Captain Cayley will come to offer it the day after to-morrow," said Hope, quietly. "I met him in the park whilst you were out this morning, and he told me he was coming to luncheon then."

Miss Griselda bristled with subdued indignation. She would have liked to take Hope up, there and then, and give her a good shaking, and drop her out of the window. The artful, designing little

creature! Then that was why she had been so willing to forego the treat of a country drive, had not even manifested the slightest disappointment when that arrangement about the pony-carriage was made. Really, what depths of deceit there were under her apparently guileless, unworldly ways! But Griselda smothered her wrath for the present. Miss Lauderdale would not suffer a word to be said against Hope in her hearing. It was astonishing how the girl had insinuated herself, what influence she had contrived to secure.

“Thank you, Miss Meredith. Captain Cayley is very kind to give us such timely notice of his intentions. Madolin, my dear, don’t you think we had almost better change the Regisons’ day now, and ask them at the same time? I am sure they would not think anything about it; and as you are not specially fond of company, it would be one

trouble instead of two. Colin could ride over this afternoon and take a note."

So, if that little chit of a hospital nurse thought she was going to have Captain Cayley all to herself to flirt with, she should find herself mistaken. Such impertinence! And for her to be the bearer of personal messages, as if she were one of themselves, forsooth!

Madolin was quite ready to consent. It was a relief to her that the Regisons should not come by themselves. Mac's presence would, at any rate, put a stop to the endless *pension* chatter which was so intolerable. Aunt Griselda and Mrs. Regison seemed to have no interests in common except those which centred in Heidelberg. Every five minutes the place was sure to come up. The poison of Aunt Griselda's tenacious memory was becoming far worse than the mosquito bites of her maxims and advice

and admonitions. So the note was despatched at once.

“And you met Uncle Mac in the park, Hope?” said Madolin, when the two were by themselves. “It is beginning to be almost funny. You and he are like old friends now, and I have not so much as seen him yet. I was very nearly saying it was too bad of you to steal a march again upon me in this way, only I could not say it in Aunt Griselda’s presence, because she is always so ready to take up anything of that sort. And it was a pleasant meeting, too; I could tell that by the look of your face when you came in. You are a real tell-tale, Hope; those honest brown eyes of yours can keep nothing back. It is well you have no bitter secrets, for I am sure you would not be able to take care of them. Was Uncle Mac as nice as ever?”

“Yes; and he walked nearly home with

me. He wanted me to sit out fishing with him, by that stream near the fir plantation, but it was so cold I did not care to stay ; and he would keep throwing bits of stick into the water, and then scolding me because I did not catch any fish. I told him it was his own fault all the time."

"And he was so displeased that he actually walked home with you. Hope, I must have you labelled 'dangerous.' It will not do for you to take walks about in parks in this way. You will find out that I can be as proper as Auntie Grisel herself."

And yet, under the pretty playfulness of Madolin's manner, there was something like a pang of jealousy ; a faint, half-acknowledged tinge of that bitterness wherewith one who walks in the valley beneath—always in the valley beneath—looks up and sees upon her companion's head the aureole of sunlight which she herself may

never, never wear. Perhaps, too, there mingled with the bitterness a sense of coming loss. Hope was very dear to her, and now Hope would be able to do without her. That proud, queenly giving which had been so pleasant to her would be needed no longer. And yet—yes, she was glad that something pleasant, a pleasant friendship, perhaps, had come into Hope's life.

“I knew you would like Mac very much;” she said. “There is no nonsense about him. At least I should think not, from what I have heard. He was very good-tempered as a boy; rather too good-tempered for me. I like a man that moves me to fight with him. I like something to battle against and conquer. I cannot bear to be given in to, and I fancy Mac is too good-natured to have a quarrel with anybody. You seem to have become quite at home with him very soon.”

“Well, yes. You must either be quite at home with him, or nothing at all. You can’t go talking on like a conversation-book. He asked me what I was going to do, and I told him all about everything.”

“What a comprehensive subject ! I quite wish the day after to-morrow would come, for I want so much to know what I shall think about him. At any rate he will be a pleasant change from the gentlemen about here who behave to you as if you were a piece of egg-shell china and must be wrapped in cotton wool and taken up with a pair of silver sugar tongs. I fancy Canadian people are different. Mac throws his opinions down before you, I should think, and you may either take them or leave them, as you like. Oh ! how refreshing it will be ! I do long for some one to quarrel with.”

“Then I’m sure Captain Cayley won’t

answer your purpose. You can't quarrel with him, he turns everything into fun, if you try."

"Oh! so you have tried. Hope, you child, how everything comes out! Well, never mind. If I can't quarrel with him, at any rate he will be a change in another way, Aunt Griselda says he is rather rough and unpolished."

"Then Aunt Griselda tells a story," said Hope, flashing up prettily until she knew that Madolin was looking keenly upon her, and then the red rose of indignation deepened into the conscious crimson of discomfiture. "I don't care. She seems to think that because he is a Canadian he must be a sort of tame elephant or amiable bullock let loose in polite society. Aunt Griselda ought to know better than to say such things about people."

"Did they, then?" said Madolin playfully,

and she put out her white hand to stroke the rosy cheek. "It shan't be teased any more, the dear, good, honest little girl! But seriously, Hope, I am very glad he has come to England just now, and I want you to be good friends, because I am sure you will get along nicely together. I only wish the Regisons were not coming the day after to-morrow. It would have been ever so much better quite by ourselves."

"Yes," said Hope emphatically. "But perhaps they won't come. They may have an engagement."

Madolin smiled.

"People like the Regisons don't have engagements when they are asked to Nunthorpe Chase, and particularly when Captain Cayleys are to be met. You are an unworldly little thing, Hope. You don't know the springs that move the great world of fashionable life; nor how some people will

give truth and honesty, and almost anything else, to get one step higher on the social ladder. Not Mrs. Regison's oldest and dearest friend will keep her from coming here to luncheon the day after to-morrow. But here is Aunt Griselda, we must be proper again."

CHAPTER XVII.

MADOLIN was quite right. Colin came back with his note. The Regisons accepted the proposed alteration—accepted it very gratefully, too. It was so kind of dear Miss Griselda to suggest the additional pleasure of a meeting with Captain Cayley. They had formed such a favourable impression of him at Rossbury that nothing could give them more satisfaction than a renewal of the acquaintance. Though indeed no inducements were needed, apart from dear Miss Lauderdale's company and Miss Griselda's, to make their visit to Nunthorpe Chase

a most delightful prospect. Mrs. Regison could not tell how much she was longing for a talk about old times. It would be such a treat to recall those pleasant—

Madolin flung down the note. She knew what was coming. Heidelberg, Heidelberg—nothing but Heidelberg. Oh! what a weariness it was. If one could but blot out the past, the future too, and be allowed simply to endure the present. But no, the burden must be carried even to the end. And these people whom she despised, vain, frivolous, shallow, selfish, had the power to sting her with every word they uttered.

That gave an air of cold, proud restraint to her manner when the Regisons really did come. That made her listen with scarcely concealed contempt when they began at the very outset of their visit to bear down upon her with a torrent of flattery.

“Such an unexpected pleasure to see you

looking so exactly the same, dear Miss Lauderdale. I could scarcely have believed it. As I was saying to Gertrude, after you called the other day, one might have thought it was only a month ago, instead of—let me see—eight years surely, since we said good-bye to you at that delightful old *pension*. You know, dear Miss Lauderdale, it is no use trying to make believe, is it? that we are just as young as ever; but really when I saw you the other day—now did I not say, Gertrude, when we saw Miss Lauderdale the other day, that she was not the least little bit altered, except of course perhaps a little more presence and dignity?"

And Mrs. Regison turned to her once blooming but now somewhat wrinkled and crow's-footed daughter—wrinkled and crow's-footed with the wearisome struggle to make the jauntiness of youth and the angularity of advancing middle age

walk harmoniously hand in hand together.

“Could you not think, Gertrude dear, that we were back again in that delightful old drawing-room, and Miss Lauderdale the queen of the circle, as she always used to be?”

Miss Lauderdale bowed. Did Mrs. Regison enjoy English country life after the Continent? It must be a great change.

“Oh! yes; but Gertrude and I are always ready for a little change. We cannot bear to be long in the same place. You know one sort of air never suits me for more than a few months. I am quite glad to be quiet for awhile. And really, since we left Heidelberg, we have never had any society half so pleasant. The people there were so very delightful, were they not?”

“Oh! yes,” said Madolin; “that deli-

cious old Colonel Paynton was perfectly irresistible. But still I hope, Mrs. Regison, you may find a few tolerable people even in this neighbourhood."

"Oh! Miss Lauderdale, now that is cruel of you! As if I meant that there could ever be the least want of society where you and dear Miss Griselda were. You really could not think me so ungrateful. But what I mean, you know, is that abroad one throws aside some of the little conventionalities which one is obliged to keep up at home. You can mix more freely with people, and that is very pleasant; though I must own it has its disadvantages sometimes. I suppose, Miss Meredith——"

And Mrs. Regison turned to Hope, who was winding a skein of wool for Aunt Griselda.

"I suppose, Miss Meredith, you have not been abroad much. I really ought to have

apologised for shutting you out of the conversation."

"I have not been shut out, thank you," said Hope, "for I once spent a year at Heidelberg, and so I do know what it is to live abroad."

"Yes," said Madolin; "and Miss Meredith happened to be there at the same time we were."

"Dear! dear! you don't say so!—how very funny! Then you remember the lovely walks, I daresay—that exquisite one in particular, a little way out of the town, near the old church of St. Elma. I do think I never saw anything so lovely in my life as that walk."

"Oh! yes. I used to go there with the other girls to sketch; and sometimes we saw a wedding coming out of the church."

"How romantic! And I always say a German wedding is very interesting—the

bride in her short petticoats and blue kirtle, and then that snow-white cap on her head; and they always have such nice rosy complexions—they make us English people, who go about for our health, look quite sallow.”

“Yes; and I remember once we could not make out at all whether what we saw was a wedding or not. A lady and gentleman went in—the lady was very dark—almost as dark as you, Miss Lauderdale—and the gentleman was very fair, and after a little while they came out again, and shook hands with each other, as if they did not at all like to part; and the lady went along towards the town, and the gentleman disappeared. I know we made up quite a little romance about it.”

“I daresay. And of course the lady was very pretty. Dark, so she could not be a German.”

"I don't know. I think I only noticed her dress. It was very singular—black and amber—you don't often see anyone wear that dress out of doors. I know we all thought it was very grand, though."

"Just fancy! Why, Miss Lauderdale, you had a dress like that yourself—don't you remember wearing it when you were acting in that charade with Gustave Nilken? And you were the bride, you know, only you wouldn't change the dress for anything more suitable, because he had said it suited you so well."

"Perhaps," said Madolin, carelessly. "My memory is really not so good as yours."

But when she had said the words, her teeth nearly met in a little silver pencil-case which she was playing with.

"Aunt Griselda, should we go into the garden now? Mrs. Regison wished to see the ferns."

“Not just now, my dear. You know Mac may be here any minute. I hope you told him two o’clock, Miss Meredith.”

“Yes,” said Hope, bending over to disentangle a knot in the wool.

“And it would be pleasanter, you know, dear, to have plenty of time in the houses. He will like to go with us too, I daresay. Funny thing about that dress, wasn’t it? How well I do remember it! We always said that Madolin looked better in it than in anything else; and I’m sure I can’t tell why she never wears that mixture of colour now. But perhaps it is because of the unpleasant associations; for really you know, dear Mrs. Regison, it was the most annoying thing that could possibly have happened, especially as it was entirely in consequence of him that my poor dear brother——”

“Yes, of course. I wonder how you can

bear to think of the fellow. And that reminds me, we had a newspaper from Australia the other day. You know everyone has relations or connections, or something of the sort, there now; and it seems there is a probability of his coming to England before the term of his transportation has expired. The paper said he had conducted himself remarkably well, and given such proofs of amendment that Government was taking into consideration a reprieve of the remainder of the sentence. Preposterous, is it not?"

Miss Griselda simply held up her hands.

"Yes," said Gertrude, "and mamma has not told you the best part of it. In a leading article the paper suggested the raising of a subscription to pay his expenses home. I hope they will give him a first-class passage, and collect as much as will provide a comfortable little annuity for him to retire

upon. I wonder everybody doesn't turn rogue, for that sort of thing seems to succeed better than honesty now."

"Yes, but you know, dear Miss Griselda, it's the insinuating way that the man has. He would come round over anybody to gain his own ends. And you remember—don't you?—how quiet and gentlemanly he was, never seemed to force himself upon anyone. Indeed he rather seemed to need drawing out than otherwise. I believe he would scarcely have spoken a word all the time if we had not noticed him. Don't you recollect, Miss Lauderdale, we all used to say how quiet he was?"

Miss Lauderdale suppressed a yawn, and fancied she could recollect a little about it, now that Mrs. Regison mentioned it again.

"Yes, and you know you were so kind to him. I don't believe we should ever have known what he really was, if you had not

brought him out. Oh, dear, those charades! How inimitably he used to act! And such a lovely tenor voice."

"Yes," said Madolin, speaking huskily and catching her breath. There was no help for it. Mrs. Regison would not be stopped. "The Heidelberg concerts were very delightful. And when Colonel Paynton tried to sing it was really almost too much for one's gravity. You remember Colonel Paynton, don't you?"

"Of course, my dear, and what fun you used to make of him, poor man! when he thought all the time he was producing quite an impression upon you. Some men are such simpletons; you can do anything with them. But Nilken was not one of that sort. He never forgot himself. And such an actor too! Can I ever forget those charades? But then, as I said to Gertrude afterwards, that was the very thing which made him

elude the detectives so long. He could get himself up so that nobody could recognise him. Dear me ! to see him come into the room in that black wig and moustache, and talk broken Italian, and stroke those little guinea pigs on the top of his old box ; one would have thought he had been born to it. I shouldn't wonder if he takes to that sort of thing when he returns to this country. He would be invaluable at a second-rate theatre."

Miss Lauderdale turned sharply away. This conversation was becoming too much for her. And Mrs. Regison's careless words had opened such a terrible door into the future. Yet whilst she listened at all, she must listen quietly, with the well-bred ease and indifference of a lady who has no other care than to make her guests enjoy their little visit. And Hope kept looking at her ; Hope, with those honest, far-seeing brown

eyes, must know that something was wrong. Sitting there opposite Miss Griselda, apparently absorbed in the task of disentangling that troublesome skein of wool, there was yet a questioning look, a touch of solicitude upon her face, which showed that she was not so unobserving as she seemed. And Hope had been to Heidelberg, and Hope had sketched the little church of St. Elma, and Hope had built up a romance about two people who had been seen at its gate one day ; the lady very dark, "almost as dark as you, Miss Lauderdale," the gentleman very fair. But only fair outside. Heavens, what a blackness of darkness must his soul have been before he could lie to her so, and make her life one long, long misery !

And even as she thought these thoughts, Miss Regison and dear Gertrude went prattling on, and Aunt Griselda seemed to enjoy nothing better than taking up those

old *Pension* times and the part the fair-haired Swede had played therein. Their voices sounded like hailstones rattling and hissing upon the brazen walls of a furnace; and she was in the furnace, life and almost consciousness scorching up within her.

“Just excuse me a little while. I must have left my lace-work upstairs in my dressing-room. Auntie Grisel, you never like to see me idle, so I must go and fetch it.”

“Let me go,” said Hope; “you look so tired. Are you ill?” she added, as she sprang to the door. “I am sure something is the matter. Do let me help you.”

“No,” whispered Madolin, almost fiercely, and she pushed Hope’s hand away from the latch. “These people worry me to death. I must be alone. Let me go.”

CHAPTER XVIII.

SHE flew across the hall, up the great staircase, and away to the oriel window at the end of the west corridor. There she sank, panting, exhausted, her hands pressed upon her heart to still its loud, angry beating. Oh! if with one great throb it would cease for ever, and free her from the unbearable misery of life!

No need for thinking or planning yet; though, truly, enough of both would need to be gone through before long; now, only to rest and be quiet for a little season, until she had gathered up strength enough to return, indifferent, listless as usual, to

the chatter of Gertrude and the flatteries of Mrs. Regison. And by the time she had gathered up strength enough for that, Aunt Griselda would think the lace-work ought to have been found, and would send Hope Meredith to expedite the search.

Hope Meredith! No; anyone but her. Hope's look of sympathy would be too much. Hope's strengthening, encouraging words would be simply irritating instead of soothing. And besides, a subtle change had, within the last day or two, passed over her feelings towards Hope. That little touch of envy, which never ceases until it has eaten out the full, ripe heart of love, was just beginning to show like a faint speck on the fair surface of their friendship.

Madolin could tolerate no rival in the hearts of those who loved her. She, and she alone, must reign there. And now the rosy dawn of another light was rising upon

the girl whom she had befriended. Already, like the first kiss of morning upon the mountain-tops, her quick eye had discerned it in Hope's brightening face and varying colour, and the unconscious smile that came and went upon her lips as she sat alone, not knowing that any watched her.

The wings of the angel must have grown large enough to veil the eyes of the woman before any daughter of Eve, unloved herself, can behold love given to another and not feel a pang of unacknowledged bitterness. And Madolin Lauderdale was in no wise an angel yet.

Not Hope, then; and she would have neither sympathy nor comfort from anyone. She would forget everything, brave everything, be her old, bright self again. Mrs. Regison's words had reminded her of the *Pension* life, with its joys, triumphs, victories; how one and another had owned

her power; how she had but to look, to speak, to smile, and a wealth of admiration was poured at her feet.

Was her power quite gone, then? Had eight years of lonely bitterness killed all the sparkle out of her eyes, all the fascination out of her smile? She would try. At any rate, it would be an amusement, and amusement she must have, interest, excitement in her life. She had little enough to look for, let her be merry whilst she could.

She went to her room, bathed her face, put a few little finishing touches to her dress, wound a scarlet shawl coquettishly round her, and was coming downstairs. Some one stood in the open doorway.

Madolin started back. A stranger! And who might not any stranger be who stood upon that threshold now? But Jetsam's shoulders were narrow and drooping, this man's were broad. Jetsam's face was pale

and long, with short-cut flaxen hair retreating from it. The stranger had a ruddy countenance, and crisp brown curls seemed almost to be pushing off the blue Glengarry cap which contrasted so well with them. And even Aunt Griselda might have owned him a gentleman as he stood there, waiting for admission to Nunthorpe Chase.

“Oh ! Uncle Mac, it is you. I am sure it must be you.” And with a great sob of relief Madolin sprang downstairs and took hold of both his hands. Better an amiable elephant, as she had called him a few days before, than the tiger who might be roaming now unchained, ready at any moment to spring upon her. Besides, had she not wanted some one upon whom to try her power ? And here he was.

“And this is little Madolin, is it ?” said Mac, looking into the eager, bright face. “Well, I suppose there is a little bit left yet

of what I used to know. But of course it's not to be Madolin any longer now. May I say that I am very pleased to meet Miss Lauderdale again?"

"No, indeed you may not," and Madolin smiled one of her most brilliant smiles. Was this the girl, Mac thought, of whom people spoke as cold, indifferent, uninterested? "Everything is just the same as it used to be."

"Except the quarrelling, I hope. I should be rather afraid of quarrelling with you now."

"Oh! yes, the quarrelling is to be the same, too. I have not had anybody for a long time now to quarrel with, and you don't know how refreshing it will be. Come into the dining-room. Aunt Griselda has been expecting you ever so long."

"The Regisons are here," she continued, with a disdainful shrug, "the people you met

at Rossbury. It would have been ever so much nicer if we had just been by ourselves ; but Aunt Griselda would have it so. And there is Hope Meredith—you know Hope Meredith."

And there was a keen, momentary quiver of light in Madolin's eyes as she looked Mac straight in the face.

"Oh ! yes—Miss Meredith and I are quite good friends already. She would tell you I made her hold my fishing-rod for me the other day, and then scolded her because she did not catch anything."

"I don't know about the catching anything. Hope is not accustomed to fishing. However, I am glad you are good friends ; and I hope we shall be too by-and-by."

"Let us settle that once for all now, shall we ?" she added, as she took him into the dining-room. How bright she looked, how gay and sparkling, how different from

the Miss Lauderdale who had left it a quarter of an hour ago. So different that, after the first greetings had passed, Aunt Griselda trotted up to her and said in a mysterious whisper,

“My dear girl, what have you been doing with yourself? You know that cordial of Dr. Clay’s is dangerous if you take too much of it; and I was sure you must be suffering from neuralgia before you left the room.”

“Oh! don’t trouble yourself, auntie. I did take a full dose, but nothing else would have enabled me to keep up, the pain was so maddening. Pray don’t take any notice, you will only make me more uncomfortable. Where is Hope Meredith?”

“I don’t know, I am sure—she disappeared soon after you went away. There is no need to look for her.”

“Oh! no, not in the least—she is quite at home. I suppose she will come in when

she wishes—she knows it is almost luncheon time.”

And then she said, in a very brilliant tone, for the benefit of the company,

“Uncle Mac and I have made friends already. I met him in the hall, and he knew me again directly—just fancy.”

“Come, come, now, Madolin, you need not put it quite so strongly as that. I only said I *supposed* it was you.”

“I will not be contradicted, Uncle Mac.”

“Certainly not, if you are the Madolin Lauderdale I remember—well, we need not say quite how many years ago.”

“Ah! Captain Cayley, if you do not remember it, I am sure no one else will.” And Mrs. Regison began to quote a piece of poetry about the foot of Time, which only treads on flowers. Though if she had expressed her most interior sentiments, she would have been better pleased if Time’s foot had crush-

ed the flowers the least bit in the world, instead of treading on them so stealthily as in the case of Miss Lauderdale; almost one might say bringing out their perfume by his touch, and doing nothing more.

And she would have been quite as well pleased too, if the baronet's daughter had shown a little less lively interest in the company of her relatives—if he was a relative—which fact she must ascertain from Miss Griselda. For who could so much as aim a dart where the beautiful Madolin Lauderdale was determined to conquer? And that she meant conquest was evident from the brilliance and animation of her manner, so different from the weary listlessness with which she had scarcely endured the conversation a little while before. Rather a poor compliment to herself and dear Gertrude, she must say; but then any one who had seen Miss Lauderdale at the *Pension* must have noticed

how she altered in the presence of gentlemen.

Not of course that she was meaning anything now, any more than she meant it then. Amusement, simply amusement. Sir David's daughter would never think of giving up her position in England, and going out to Canada as the wife of a man who was never likely to bring her a title. But that did not make any difference. Of course, if she had set her mind upon conquering him, she would never rest until she had done it; just the same as she used to do with those poor fellows at Heidelberg, drawing them on and encouraging them, and smiling and flirting until she brought them to the point, and then quietly telling them they had been mistaken; she had never intended anything but kindness. Somebody ought to give poor Captain Cayley a hint about it. Doubtless he had his views in coming to England. It was

all very well to talk about business, and that sort of thing, but everybody knew it meant a great deal more than that. And now here was Miss Lauderdale beginning to amuse herself with him, and all that she would do would be to take up his time and prevent some really worthy woman from engaging his affections. It was too bad.

All this was in Mrs. Regison's mind as Madolin chatted away to the new-comer. Aunt Griselda was astonished. Surely something stronger than Dr. Clay's cordial must be working such wonders in her proud, indifferent niece.

"I am sure, Uncle Mac," she said, "we ought to be very much obliged to you for rousing Madolin up so. I tell her she stays moping here from one year to another until she almost forgets the existence of anything outside the Chase. Now is it not so, Madolin my dear?"

How devoutly Madolin wished it *was* so, but she only answered, gaily enough—

“Uncle Mac will change all that. Besides, what was the use of pretending to be strangers? It was much better to settle down like old friends from the very beginning. Miss Regison, what do you think? Captain Cayley used to swing me when I was a little girl no taller than this.”

And Madolin, stooping, held her hand about a yard from the ground.

“Oh! how charming!” drawled Gertrude.

“I don’t think it was charming at all, Miss Regison,” said Mac, “you have no idea how she used to scold me if I happened to jerk her on one side, or if I didn’t swing her high enough. And I have known her scratch like a little panther sometimes, when she was in a bad temper. It is no use your contradicting me, Madolin.”

“I don’t want to contradict you. It is

quite true, and I shall do just the same now if you do not behave properly."

"Thank you, very much. I was thinking of asking you if you would allow me to stay for a few days, but, after that generous expression of your sentiments, I think I shall be safer at Rossbury. I find that I have to be in London some time next week, about this land business, and there is no knowing when I may be back again."

"Then you must stay now; that is quite settled. Indeed, papa expects you are coming to stay, and you don't know how much I want a little cheerful company. Auntie Grisel is always scolding me because I don't go out enough, and the real reason is, that she never takes me to any but the dullest, stupidest places. Now, Mrs. Regison, *did* I ever mope at Heidelberg?"

"On the contrary, my dear, you were the life and soul of the *Pension*. I often

used to say—did I not, Gertrude?—what *should* we do without Miss Lauderdale?”

“You did, indeed, mamma,” replied that damsel, who was beginning to feel rather crushed beneath the Lauderdale animation. “And I am quite sure if anyone had asked Mr. Nilken——”

“Oh! it was just because there were plenty of people there to amuse me,” said Madolin, impatiently; “and here one lives on such a dead level from day to day. Why, if I had anyone the least bit interesting in the world to talk to, you would soon find out how brilliant I could be.”

“My dear Madolin,”—and Aunt Griselda’s lips curled with not quite ungratified womanly spite—“what would Miss Meredith say if she were to hear that?”

“Miss Meredith would say that Miss Lauderdale was quite right,” said Hope, coming out from the little curtained recess

at the end of the room, where she had been sitting ever since Madolin went away. "Miss Lauderdale would be a great deal happier if she had more society; I am quite sure of that."

"Or if she had somebody the least bit interesting," said Miss Griselda, with a meaning smile.

Madolin tossed her head.

"Well, never mind," continued Hope. "If you mean me, Miss Griselda, I never thought that I was very interesting,"

"I think you are a little traitor," said Mac, coming forward to shake hands with her. "Hiding there like a mouse behind the curtain. Why, we might have been saying no end of wicked things about you."

But, as their eyes met, there was a kindly light in both, and Hope felt, by the strong clasp of Mac's hand, that the "wicked things," if said at all, would not be said by

him. Still it had been very strange to her to sit there and listen. Miss Lauderdale in the character of a gay, fascinating woman of society was a problem she could not understand. All the sadness and longing seemed to have died out of her, but the brightness which had come in their place seemed sadder still. Hope felt that it did not ring true. And then there was a touch of hollowness in the little inference to herself. At least, if it was not hollowness, and Madolin Lauderdale could never be hollow, there was a tinge of insincerity about it—it had been said for effect, not because the thing was true.

The entrance of luncheon and Sir David changed the conversation. Then came the promised stroll round the grounds, in which Miss Griselda adroitly contrived to keep Hope by herself and Mrs. Regison, whilst Madolin, Gertrude, and the Captain saunt-

ered behind. Because, as she said, Hope knew so much about ferns, and would be able to give dear Mrs. Regison all the information about the rare varieties which had lately been planted in the Swiss garden.

Miss Griselda was surprised, but very much pleased at the change in Madolin's behaviour since Uncle Mac had come upon the scene. It argued, so the good lady thought, a disposition to be pleased, even yet a willingness to conquer, and possibly to be conquered. And though of course anything of that sort would quite put a stop to the little plans which Mrs. Regison and Gertrude were evidently ready to entertain, that was not of the slightest consequence, so long as something definite could be arranged for Madolin.

For in that case Sir David, being left to himself once more, who so suitable a com-

panion for him as his sister, and what position for her so pleasant as being mistress of Nunthorpe Chase? Of course that was what things would come to, whenever Madolin married.

Thus thought Griselda Lauderdale to herself as she conducted dear Mrs. Regison round the new Swiss garden.

CHAPTER XIX.

THAT luncheon over, the Regisons disposed of, Captain Cayley away with Sir David to look at some improvements on the home farm, and Aunt Griselda settled down with her knitting work in the dining-room—Hope in attendance to sort out shades or pick up dropped stitches—Mado-
lin was able to shut herself up in her own room and do a little thinking.

She might so have arranged it, and perhaps, two hours ago, would so have arranged it, that Hope should have joined Sir David and Uncle Mac in their ramble round the home farm. But a something

which as yet had scarcely shaped itself into distinctness, made it easy for her to represent to herself that Aunt Griselda ought not to be left so long alone; and as she did not care to offer her own companionship, Hope was allowed to fill up the gap. Besides, Hope was so good. She never seemed to think anything a trouble.

Two hours. Little enough to change the current of a whole life. Yet Madolin's was changed. The old storm and unrest had come back. The terrible secret, which she thought for a time at least was safely put aside, had broken loose again and was stalking forth almost in her very presence. Hope had got hold of some threads which might draw it near. If Mrs. Regison's curiosity should awake, as was likely enough, hunt out dates, places, circumstances, and find that they corresponded with Hope's recollections of that Heidelberg year. If Jetsam should make

his appearance, and who could tell how soon that might be ?

And yet she was helpless. She could absolutely do nothing. If the man came, she could but bribe him away with large sums of money. He had risked his freedom for gold once. He would not scruple to buy other things with it now. Only where should money come from ? That poor Spanish mother of hers had left no portion for her, save her own beauty and passion ; and Sir David required an exact account of all the expenses of the household. How was she sufficiently to bribe a man who had an unbounded authority over her ?

And then if Hope knew, if Hope should begin to suspect ! For to one who already knows the worst, it seems so easy for others to find it out. That thought gave her a pang of anger against the innocent girl. Another veil of separation was weav-

ing itself between her and Hope Meredith, a veil of separation inevitable between a proud, lofty nature, compelled for self-preservation to unworthy shifts of concealment, and one humble, tender, yet unconsciously possessing a terrible power of injury. Already there stirred in Madolin's heart the germ of such feelings as would spring into life did Hope really know ; fear, distrust, suspicion, hatred ; and then, touching all these into greater vividness, the passion which could perhaps move Madolin Lauderdale more strongly than any other—jealousy.

The hearts of Hope Meredith and Uncle Mac were trembling towards each other. A touch might separate them. A touch might unite them. And then they would be so happy. But who is it says there is a something which does not please us in the happiness of our friends ?

Madolin sat thinking, thinking.

“Reptile that I am !” she said at last, springing up with a gesture as if to push away some venomous creature.

For, only a week ago, in that very room, she had helped Hope to array herself for the Rossbury party, and she was pleased to see the girl so fair in her round, young beauty ; and, with her own hands, she had put the finishing touches to her dress, and laid the flowers in her hair ; and then she had kissed her, and when Hope went away it seemed as if a light had gone. Now !—and Madolin paced up and down the room again.

“There is something better in me than this,” she murmured. “I will be true to it. I will not let myself be conquered.”

And in her tightly-clasped hands, and in her uplifted, though tearless, eyes, and in the sigh which struggled through her parted

lips, the angels of God, who are never far from any suffering human soul, might have felt a prayer.

There were voices on the terrace beneath the window. She looked out, and, in the soft sunlight of that May afternoon, saw Hope Meredith and Uncle Mac sauntering among the flowers, talking to each other in low, subdued tones. He had not looked so pleasantly upon her an hour ago, though she had put forth all her powers to dazzle him. Was he, then, giving to this untrained country girl what her own brilliance could not win? And yet no wonder. Years of angry bitterness had wasted the roundness from her face. Hope's was young and fresh and unspoiled. Had it not better have been losing a little of its freshness at a hospital bed-side? It might have been, even now.

"I brought her here," Madolin whispered

to herself, through her clenched teeth,—“I brought her here to make her fair and lovely again, and now she triumphs over me. Ha! what a weariness life is! I used to triumph once. I wonder if it is all over now? Never mind; let us make the best of it whilst we can.” And Madolin turned away.

There was a time in the life of the blackest traitor upon earth when a moment's pause might have saved him,—when the voice of his good angel, heard and obeyed, would have kept him from his sin,—when one holy, self-denying thought, held firmly down upon the sluices of evil purpose, would have stayed their outgoing. But that moment's pause was never made; that voice, once neglected, spoke no more; the evil purpose was left to take its own way, until, by-and-by, no human touch could

hold the flood-gates before it, and the man was lost.

Madolin rang the bell for her maid. Bright-eyed, rosy-faced little Tossie came.

"Tell Catton I am ready for her. And you may come too, Tossie; you may be wanted to help."

Catton came.

"You are early, ma'am. I did not expect you would be ready for me just yet."

"No, Catton; but I want you to look out some of my pretty things, and then you shall do the best you can for me to-night. It is such a long time since I tried to look nice."

"Indeed, ma'am," said the fluent Catton, "you can't help looking that, whether you try or not; but I *will* say it's a pity you don't spend a deal more time over yourself than what you do. I never knew anybody that paid better for good dressing. If

you would only take as much pains with yourself, ma'am, as you did last week with Miss Meredith, and give your mind to it, as I may say, there wouldn't be a Lauderdale in all the portrait gallery, ma'am, to do more credit to the family."

"Well, Catton, you shall have your own way to-night. Do just as you like with me; only it must not be black and amber. I hate black and amber!"

"Yes, ma'am. I should say the black gauze and your silver ornaments, with a few sprays of that crimson fuschia in the hot-house."

Tossie's eyes began to brighten at the mention of the hothouse.

"Yes, Catton, that will do very nicely. Tossie, go and ask the gardener to give you a few of the best he can find."

"Yes, ma'am," said the girl; "and some for Miss Meredith, too?"

“Well, no. Miss Meredith will order what flowers she chooses. We shall not care to be alike. And some sprays of maiden-hair, Tossie.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

So whilst Tossie flirted with the undergardener, Catton brought out my lady's finery, and the dark hair was wound into a braid over my lady's low forehead, and festooned with a silver arrow; and a medallion chain of the finest, daintiest Indian silver-work was put upon my lady's neck, and silver drops in her small white ears, and silver bracelets on her arms, whose creamy roundness the black gauze showed so well. And then just a touch of powder was sprinkled over the braids, and the faintest tinge of rouge dropped upon the cheeks, and when Tossie returned, the plume of crimson fuschia was arranged by Catton's skilful hands, and a frond or two of

feathery maiden-hair completed the whole.

“There, ma’am,” said the triumphant Abigail. “If you’d stepped down from one of the gilt frames in the drawing-room you couldn’t have been more beautiful. If I could have my way, ma’am, you should never go down of an evening different to that. Some looks best in one sort, and some in another ; but black and silver, with a bit of crimson touched in where it’s wanted, is what you’ll never beat, ma’am.”

“There, there, Catton, that will do. What’s the use of beginning to flatter me in my old age?”

“Old age, ma’am, indeed ! I should like to see anybody look at you and talk of old age. You’re as like as can be to the Lady Lauderdale, Sir Rupert’s wife, that I’ve heard my grandmother talk about, that they called the belle of the county ; and she broke more hearts than any of the family before her.”

Madolin smiled. "Well, give me my fan, Catton—poor mamma's black one, with the silver embroidery. And my handkerchief—where is it?"

"Here, ma'am," said Tossie, who had been watching her mistress, eager-eyed, bright, expectant.

Oh, for the time when she should be a real lady's-maid herself, and handle those beautiful dresses and laces and jewels, which now she only looked upon afar off!

"It's that Canadian gentleman, I'll be bound," said Catton to herself as she held the door open and watched her mistress step supremely down the broad staircase; "and I'd like to see her wed, too, if that's to be it, because—for as beautiful as she is, and I wouldn't wish to set eyes on a better—she isn't what she used to be ten years ago."



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